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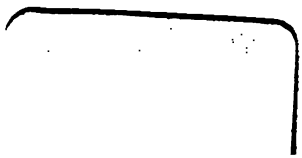
The Miracle Worker

Gerald Maxwell



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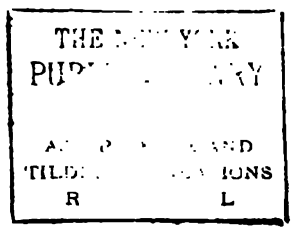
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THE
MIRACLE WORKER

BY

GERALD MAXWELL

Frontispiece by George F. Gray

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I

THE whole city was one blaze of light; in every window lighted candles had been placed, and almost every room from the first floor up to the attics contained an inner pyramid of light, formed by a glittering Christmas tree. It was Christmas eve, and although the streets were far less crowded than they had been on any night during the last three weeks, plenty of people were moving about in them. Folks who had not bought a tree themselves nevertheless took a keen interest in the trees of their neighbours; and those who had a tree and children of their own were glad to draw back the window-curtains so that these childless ones might see the brave preparations they had made. As on a mountain, the trees gradually grew smaller as the height increased, but those one could see from the street were dazzling indeed, lit with hundreds of coloured tapers and flashing with gold globes and silver stars; festooned with bright ribbons and hung with a myriad tinsel trifles. But one felt that the others, which one could not see because they were hidden away under the high-pitched roofs, ought to have given, at least, as much pleasure; since, though they were no doubt less gorgeous to look at, they had really cost so much more.

Most of the sightseers found their way sooner or later to the wide open space between the museum and

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the new municipal theatre, where the miniature town of stalls, which had hitherto been busy with the sale of Christmas-tree decorations, now offered every variety of temptation in the way of food. There were Frankfort sausages to be eaten piping hot with a slice of rye bread, and a delectable kind of currant loaf, frosted with sugar and shaped like a long French roll, that comes from Dresden, while on all sides were displayed cakes of every imaginable kind made of the gingerbread for which Leipzig itself is famous. These delicacies appealed chiefly, of course, to ever hungry youth, to the shop-girl and her soldier-lover, who were both blessed with healthy appetites. Their parents were, for the most part, well content to look on; but they complained that Christmas was no longer what it had been, recalling how, when they were young, it used to freeze for ten weeks at a stretch each year; how winter was not mixed up with summer then, nor summer with winter; how, in short, everything had not only been better but cheaper in those happy never-to-be-forgotten days.

The second floor of one of the houses formed a striking contrast to the general illumination; for all the light behind the three windows that looked out upon the Augustus Platz was concentrated on a big desk which stood in one corner of the lofty oak-panelled room. Here, high above the heads of the pleasure-seeking crowd, sat an elderly man, writing, as it were, for dear life, quite oblivious of all the bustle that was going on in the square outside. Not that Curt Weigand was out of sympathy with these good people, being by birth one of them, but he had long ceased to take any part in their joys or sorrows; his services had been ren-

dered to humanity at large rather than to his townsfolk, so that few of them knew the great surgeon, even by sight. At the moment he was engaged upon an important paper, no less than his Presidential address in the Physiological Section of the forthcoming Congress at Vienna; and, contrary to precedent, the Professor had determined to communicate a discovery, instead of indicating the direction in which one might be looked for. His hand had been to some extent forced by the fact that rumours concerning his recent investigations were already current in medical circles.

Every doctor in Europe knew that the famous physiologist had made a journey to Central Asia in order to secure specimens of a certain rare shrub which grew in the foot-hills of the Hindoo Kush. Vaguely they had heard that its habitat and properties had been brought to the Professor's notice by a pupil of his, a young man of native birth, now a doctor of medicine and resident in Leipzig. But one only knew the actual result obtained. Ahmed Khan alone had seen the effect that a volatile fluid extracted from the fibres of this plant could produce upon the nervous system of highly organised animals. For many months they had watched this effect together, and it had always proved so remarkable that Weigand was full of anxiety to publish the knowledge of their discovery to the scientific world. It had been for that reason that he had broken away from generalities in the paper before him, to describe the extraordinary success of their preliminary experiments with a new anæsthetic which might possibly bring about another revolution in surgery. Certainly it would create a sensation among his fellow-

workers; it would also encounter no little opposition. There were quarters from which hostility was, of course, to be expected; neither Paris nor St. Petersburg would readily admit that a German could find out anything, while some even of the Professor's Berlin colleagues would be far from pleased that they had not made the discovery themselves. It would, indeed, only be welcomed by English men of science; but, then, they might not hear of it for such a long time.

Weigand had, however, no desire to claim the entire credit himself. To be sure, he had read, years ago, how the sap of this wonderful plant was employed with deadly effect by Ghazis; and how, when the fakirs cut themselves with knives, they first smeared them with a pulp made from its leaves. But he could never have got a single specimen without the help of his assistant. For the tribesmen were well aware that the plant contained a powerful poison and had always jealously guarded the secret of its whereabouts. Indeed, it was doubtful whether any one but a native would have been permitted to gather the leaves, even if he had been able to discover one of the few spots where the shrub appeared. As the Professor's pen glided rapidly on, his mind was filled with that glow of satisfaction which is felt only by those who have realised a great and unselfish ambition. He had no disturbing doubts about the efficacy of this hitherto unknown anodyne; for although it had not yet been tried on that supremely important animal man, it had answered perfectly with some of man's nearest relations. The drug proved safe to administer, and held its subject in a state of completely suspended animation for several hours.

So absorbed was Weigand in his writing that he did not look up when a soldier-like man, in a semi-military uniform, opened the door at the farther end of the room. The postman marched towards the Professor's desk, halting only when he reached it; then, bringing his heels together and his left hand up to the circular badge in his cap, he held out a thin piece of folded paper.

"For his Excellency, the Privy Councillor, Professor, Doctor von Weigand," he said in the parade-ground voice of an under-officer, anxious not to deprive the recipient of one particle of his correct official style. "Tcha!" exclaimed the Professor, with a long-drawn sigh of disgust, turning at last towards the intruder. When he had glanced hurriedly through the telegram, he again took up his pen and wrote a few words very distinctly on the form which had been placed before him. He then rose, and having ceremoniously conducted the messenger to the door, went to the foot of a staircase that led to an upper room and called out loud enough to be heard above —

"Ahmed, come here a moment, if you please!"

A few seconds later the door at the top of the stairs opened, and a tall man in a long white apron with sleeves stepped out on to the landing. His thick dark hair, which was brushed straight back from the forehead, showed that he was not very old — though his pallid face gave no particular indication of youth, so long as his firm red lips remained hidden by the droop of a silky black moustache. He did not, at first sight, suggest the Oriental, but rather a somewhat uncommon type of European. One thing, however, about him immediately struck a stranger as belonging to a semi-

savage race. His gait, though swift, was of an ungainly and almost ape-like character. To the casual observer he seemed, therefore, to move awkwardly, but his tread was wonderfully soft, while, in repose, his attitude often produced the impression that he was drawing himself together for a spring. In this one trait the natural instinct of generations of hunters pierced through the acquired habit of the student. As he stood at the head of the stairs, his slim figure sharply outlined against the stronger light in the room behind him, leaning forward with his knees slightly bent, it became marked in a peculiar degree.

"I am called away, my friend," said the Professor.

"Must you go, sir?" asked his assistant.

"Yes! Although it is only to stand by a death-bed, I fear."

He then went to a large oblong table that occupied the centre of the room, and picked up from among the books and pamphlets with which it was piled a copy of the Imperial Railway Guide. Returning to his desk, the Professor quickly found the page he required; and, after glancing at it for a moment under the light, he looked round towards Ahmed and said: "I shall want you to accompany me to-night; the train leaves here at eleven o'clock. You will be ready then?"

"I shall be ready as soon as I have told Louis about feeding our pensioners," Ahmed replied, pointing to the room behind him. "When do we return?"

"Not till to-morrow, at the earliest," said the Professor, with a glance of regret at his desk, as he bent over it to gather the scattered sheets of MS. together, so that he might continue his interrupted work during the journey.

"Then, with your permission, I will take Fritzchen home, and ask some one to look after him to-night." As he said this the young man stooped down to pat a small dog, of the Dachshund family, though obviously a poor relation of whom his thoroughbred cousins had no great reason to be proud. It had trotted out on to the landing after him, slightly dragging one of its hind feet, and it now gazed inquiringly up at him with a look of intelligence in its big brown eyes.

"Ah," said his master, addressing the dog, as though there were the most perfect understanding between them, "you will howl to-night, my Fritzchen, and then, perhaps, Elsa may let you sleep on her bed. Eh, you rascal?"

Less than an hour later Doctor Weigand was being driven, with his assistant, down the Goethe Strasse, past the great gloomy theatre and the frozen lake beyond it, towards the farthest of the three big railway stations that stand side by side to the north of the public gardens. The snow had been swept up into heaps, so that their drosky bowled along at a good rate, and before eleven they were comfortably seated in a first-class coupé, which a uniformed official had immediately placed at the disposal of his Excellency. Moreover, this affable personage charged himself with a brief telegram the Professor dashed off in great haste; and he also promised that, notwithstanding all orders to the contrary, the Frankfort express should stop at the insignificant station of Sachsenroda.

By the time this matter had been satisfactorily settled, the train was on the point of starting, and in a few seconds it was gliding out from under the great

glass roof. Meanwhile the station authorities big and small stood to attention; and saluted as the carriage containing the famous doctor passed them. But Meigand, unconscious of all this official politeness, had already sunk back into the farther corner of the compartment. His writing materials, held in a roomy black leather portfolio, were spread out on his knee, and after slowly turning over the pages of a large notebook for a little while, he plunged once more into the address he intended to deliver at the approaching medical Congress. But until he was able to take up the broken thread of his exposition, the Professor gave vent to his feelings of suppressed irritation by muttering to himself in an undertone: "Why do they send for me, only when it is of no use? To pronounce sentence, and acquit the physician in attendance of blame: when if one had been called in earlier perhaps something might have been done. Not that they have lost any time in this case; it must, though, have ended fatally from the first. That's why Engelbrecht is so anxious to have my opinion, I suppose."

Although the Professor had not the smallest idea that he was thinking aloud, these words were distinctly heard by his silent assistant, whose ears had been trained from boyhood to catch sounds which would be quite inaudible to the man who had always lived in cities. Strangely enough Ahmed had lost none of his original faculties through contact with Western culture; but had rather brought them to perfection in his biological researches; his eye was as keen, his hand as sure, and both worked together with the same wonderful accord as when he had depended upon them for

self-preservation. He had listened to Weigand's muttered tirade, with his upper lip lifted by a curious smile, which partly revealed the regular curve of his strong teeth; and following out the Professor's thought, he reflected: After all, the highest skill availed little in any serious complication; so much remained that the most daring surgeon could not do. However intricate an operation was, it must be performed in less than three hours, and however successful, the subject did not always recover from the anæsthetic. Would that be changed one day? And would he have assisted in bringing that change about? Then, as though to set his mind at rest, he drew out from his breast-pocket a small oblong case and opened it very carefully, in order not to damage the fragile object it contained. This was a slender stoppered glass tube, holding some colourless mobile fluid, which as he tilted the case gently backwards and forwards had the appearance of an ordinary spirit-level. He looked upon it steadfastly, for a long time, with an expression of intense pride. It was indeed extremely precious, being the extract of that terrible plant which his people knew by its Arabic name *Summ ul Kabtli*, or the death-dealer; but concentrated and refined, still deadly in unskilful hands, yet capable of saving life. "Had it not already saved Fritzchen from destruction when his leg was crushed under that cruel wheel, and what this marvellous vegetable essence had done for a dog, might it not also accomplish for a man?" But, as he put the case away with the same loving care, he remembered that this question could only be answered at the risk of a man's life.

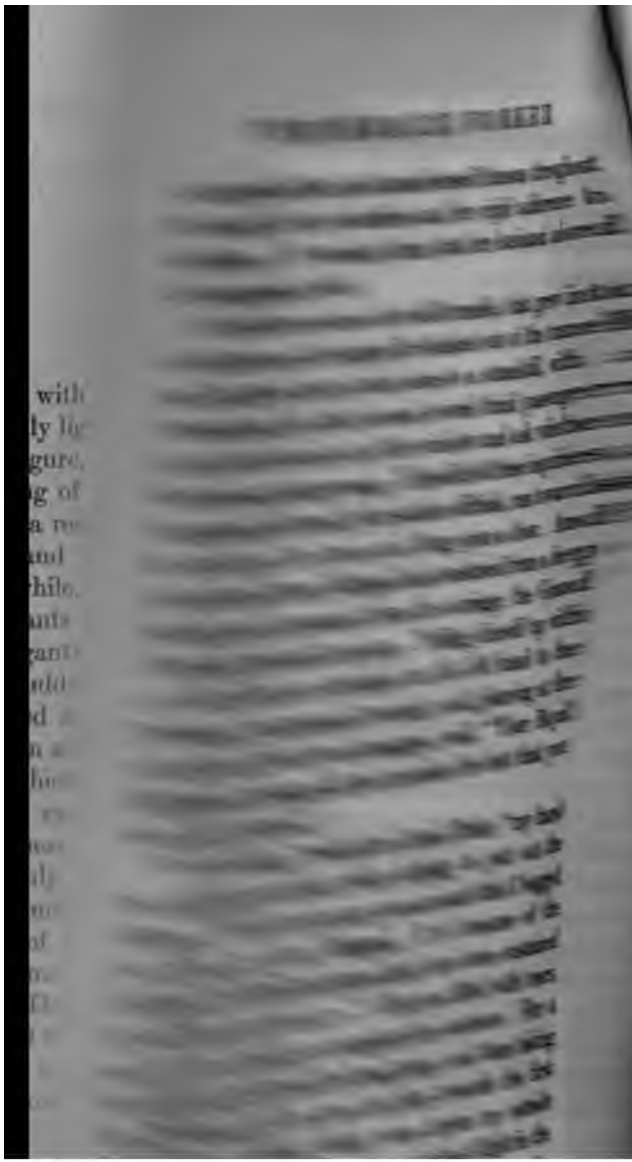
II

SOLITARY and bent with sorrow, at the end of the long platform of the dimly lighted Sachsenroda station stood a tall, soldier-like figure, whose eyes were intently fixed on the dark opening of the tunnel into which the line soon plunged. At a respectful distance several men in various military and civil undress uniforms were grouped together, while, in the shadow midway between these silent attendants and their well-beloved Prince, was stretched a gigantic boarhound wearing a muzzle of stout leather studded with brass. The dog, from time to time, looked stealthily up at him whom grief held thus aloof from all companionship, with that gaze of mute inquiry which can convey far more comfort than any spoken expression of human sympathy. Sigurd could not guess what the nature of the blow was that had so suddenly fallen upon the husband of his mistress, but he seemed to divine that it was one which passed his power of consolation; besides, he did not venture to show himself, well knowing that he had no right to be there. He had broken loose when he heard the horses being put to in the dark stable-yard, and had followed the royal troïka all the way to the station, which it reached more than a quarter of an hour before the other sledges.

The Grand Duke had been awaiting the arrival of

the express from Leipzig with an impatience that increased with each succeeding moment. Though it was not time to pass Sachsenroda for another five minutes, he now again asked the station-master whether anything had occurrred to cause a delay. "No, your Royal Highness," the anxious official promptly replied, "it has just been signalled from Mittelburg, and should be here to the moment." The railway man would assuredly have hastened the arrival of the train if he could; for the Grand Duke of Thüringen was beloved by his subjects and they had reason to love him, for he had ever been, in the best sense of the words, the father of the land. He had kept peace within its frontiers, and had fought for it when threatened by enemies from without, having served with distinction in those campaigns of victory that had welded their people into a great nation. Yet in spite of his years he bore himself perfectly erect, as a rule, and still had the firm footstep of a strong man. To-night, however, he was crushed under the disaster that had overtaken his beautiful young wife.

It was many years since her Imperial and Royal Highness, the late Grand Duchess, had been laid to rest under the golden dome of the Greek chapel on the slope of the wooded hill above Mittelburg, and about eighteen months ago he had married Amalia Paulli, an Austrian actress who had played for two seasons at the Court Theatre, in which he had always taken such a profound interest. The breath of scandal had never touched the good name of Countess Lichtenthal, and she was even more popular with all classes than the Grand Duchess herself had been; though the Russian,



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Such a recital, the Professor realised, would be ap
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"It occurred in a second," he said, "before anybody
could realise the danger. We must have been blind,
but somehow one does not think of these things when
one is happy; and it was enough to make one happy,
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dear, she had so looked forward to to-night! Amy
always loved little ones, though she has none

as they called her, had made herself famous throughout the land for her charities and her rigid adherence to etiquette. No wonder, then, that her husband adored his morganatic wife.

At last there came a low dull rumble, that grew into a loud roar as the engine fire flashed out of the tunnel, and the great heavy train came to a standstill, with a tremendous jerk that caused several timid passengers to put their heads out of the window and ask whether there was anything wrong. Unheedful of these inquiries, the guards, followed by the station officials, ran towards the centre of the train and flung open a door. And by the time Doctor Weigand had awakened from a deep slumber and descended from the carriage, the Grand Duke had reached the place. Pulling himself up with a visible effort, he stretched out his left hand to the Professor, who grasped it warmly, and, glancing at the other hand which was bandaged, said, "Your Royal Highness's message did not mention the fact that you were hurt yourself."

"It is nothing," replied the Grand Duke; "my hand was slightly scorched while helping to put out the flames. But it is not on my own account that I begged you come, my dear Weigand. It is because of the injuries, the horrible injuries that have been sustained by another, one who is —" His eyes filled with tears, and he was unable to complete the sentence. For a few seconds he turned his head away, and then taking the Professor by the arm led him towards the first of the three sleighs, which were drawn up outside the station, their big lamps making circles of light in the surrounding darkness. Ahmed followed, carrying the

great man's portfolio in one hand and a big leather bag in the other, both of which he refused to entrust to the drab-coated lackeys who eagerly offered to relieve him of them. He was accompanied by one of the Grand Ducal Chamberlains, who allotted him a place along with two minor Court officials in the second sleigh, the last being filled by the military staff. While taking his seat, Ahmed noticed the stately manner in which the coachmen sat bareheaded, holding their hats in their hands until they got the word to start.

The Russian sledge, drawn by three thoroughbred blacks, in which Weigand was seated alone with the Grand Duke, dashed off at a great pace over the smooth, hard-packed snow, and the straggling little town of Sachsenroda had already been left behind when he asked his companion to explain how the accident had come about.

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"It occurred in a second," he said, "before anybody could realise the danger. We must have been blind, but somehow one does not think of these things when one is happy; and it was enough to make one happy, merely to see her with the children about her. Poor dear, she had so looked forward to to-night! Amy has always loved little ones, though she has none of her own.

And to-night she wanted to give them a glorious treat, an evening they would not forget until Christmas came again. She had instructed the foresters to bring in a tree which was so big that it could only just be got into the audience-chamber, and round the room we had placed presents for everybody with our own hands. The things had been coming for weeks from Vienna, where she had ordered them months ago, and the decorations of the Christmas tree itself had been arranged, under Amy's direction, with the exquisite taste that belongs only to the born artist.

"We had risen from the table early, so as not to keep our little guests waiting, and when I entered the brilliantly lighted room, with Amy by my side, I was struck with the beauty of the scene. After we had made one tour of the room together and had talked to some of the parents, we were separated by a swarm of little people, who had at first clung fast to the skirts of their mothers, but who soon crowded round my wife. She had drawn them to her with her sweet smile, that seemed to embrace them all and yet to have a special meaning for each of them. It is part of herself, Professor, and not a grace acquired by practice, though naturally it always charmed those who saw her on the stage. Amy knew the name of every child, too, and could tell on which table it would find the toy meant for it. But, eager and excited as they were to know what she had given them, they appeared in no hurry to leave her.

The little ones followed the Countess towards the lighted tree, and gazed in wonder at the thousand sparkling ornaments that it was loaded with. One of these, a tinsel figure of Harlekin, so fascinated Minna

Schultz, the five-year-old daughter of our head-forester, that she begged Amy to give it to her; and when my wife told her that she might have the doll to-morrow, the child's eyes filled with tears. Alarmed at these signals of distress, Amy decided to gratify her little friend's wish at once, and bent forward in order to unfasten the figure from the branch it hung on. But it was fixed there by a wire that took some time to unwind, and meanwhile one of the tapers lower down must have set fire to an end of the lace shawl which was loosely draped about my wife's shoulders. An instant later she had sprung back, thrown the doll down beside the terrified Minna, and was rushing towards the door, the upper part of her dress in a blaze. Every one in the room seemed, for the moment, paralysed with horror; at any rate, no one attempted to extinguish those cruel flames. I know that I did not myself immediately grasp what had happened. My poor dear was half-way up the stairs before I could overtake her and wrap a woollen cloth I had snatched from one of the tables tightly round her."

It was evident that in smothering the flames the Grand Duke's right hand had been badly burnt, though he did not allude to his own injuries. Weigand had carefully abstained from interrupting him by a single query; but, as soon as he was sure that his account of the accident had come to an end, he asked him two or three direct questions.

"Of course, the Court physician was sent for at once?"

"Yes!" answered his companion somewhat wearily. "I believe Doctor Engelbrecht was fetched without delay."

"What did he say, after he had examined the extent of the surface attacked?"

"Nothing definite. When he saw how severely Amy's neck and face were scorched he shook his head, but when I pressed for his opinion he refused to commit himself, and suggested an immediate consultation with you, Professor."

"Well, your Royal Highness," said Weigand, putting as much hopefulness into his words as was possible in the circumstances, "there again no time was lost."

"Yes; we acted promptly enough *then*," said the Grand Duke, with an accent of bitter self-reproach. "That telegram was sent off, and the treatment you advised was followed religiously; but even that gave no apparent relief! Hour after hour I have had to sit by the side of my wife and to watch her sufferings, knowing that we could do nothing to alleviate them; to hear her moan like a dumb animal in pain; to see the cold sweat break out upon her forehead, while from time to time she shivered all over, and her face was contracted with spasms of intolerable agony. But you will help us to save her, my friend, I feel sure of that. You see, I put my trust in your skill."

"Your Royal Highness," replied the Professor, in a grave, calm tone, "we will put our trust in the healing power of nature."

Still, although pain was a favourable symptom, he knew too well the narrow limits of this force, where man is concerned, to be at all certain of a recovery, and much as he wished to comfort the despairing man by his side, he had failed to speak with that accent of conviction which inspires hope. And as they were hurried

across the open wind-swept plateau under the pale stars, both men relapsed into silence, feeling cold in spite of their heavy wraps, which were not proof against the chill that arose from within. A few minutes later, after traversing the triple avenue of limes that led to the palace of Wilhelmsbrunn, they were pulled up short, with much jangling of bells and scraping of iron shoes on the slippery ground, beneath a heavy classic portico that formed the main entrance to the enormous stone building. It was only then Weigand discovered that the now steaming Orloffs had left the horses in the other two sledges far behind. Off the narrow tracks made by the runners and the horses' hoofs one sank over a foot deep into the snow at every step, so that, after ploughing through it for more than half an hour, the big hound had been obliged to lie down exhausted, near the top of the hill. There he was seen by Ahmed, who came up with him a few minutes later. The young man at once asked his companions to stop the sledge, and before it could come to a halt, he had jumped out on the roadside.

"Take care!" shouted the chamberlain, horrified at seeing him approach Sigurd. "That is a very savage dog."

"He's a very tired dog," replied Ahmed, laughingly, as he bent down towards the breathless hound that was in evident distress, panting loudly, and vainly endeavouring to get rid of its muzzle.

"For heaven's sake, doctor," the courtier cried out, in a tone of still greater alarm, "do not touch him; the dog is dangerous — capable of killing one, they say."

"Yes," said Ahmed, calmly unbuckling the thick strap round Sigurd's neck, "people *say* that, perhaps, but a dog is generally better than his reputation. There!" he exclaimed, a second later, as the Great Dane rose with a tremendous shake and sidled up to him. It would, indeed, have rubbed its unmuzzled head against the doctor's leg, had he not repulsed this friendly demonstration and re-entered the sledge. When Ahmed had again taken his seat, the others expressed their astonishment at the manner in which the dog behaved, and all were agreed that if the Countess could have seen it she would have been overjoyed. For Sigurd belonged to her, they told him, and Madame declared that the dog was never vicious, which they doubted, though with her, poor lady, he had always been gentleness itself. They also told him — now that the barrier between them and the stranger was broken — much more concerning Countess Lichtenthal's great amiability, which they declared to be as remarkable as her beauty.

The Grand Duke conducted Weigand quickly through a lofty pillared hall, where a long line of servants waited with sad faces and mournful mien, and then hastened on before him up a great marble staircase, towards the apartments of the Countess. At the anteroom door they were met by a stout, bald-headed man, whom the Professor had some difficulty in recognising as his fellow-student, Georg Engelbrecht. For there was little in the present appearance of that once distinguished member of the Corps Saxonia to recall the slim youth of those far-off days. His small eyes had become surrounded by heavy wrinkled bags from

which they blinked perpetually, while a feeble smile of deprecation played about the corners of his pursed-up lips. Nor was his manner particularly reassuring when he answered the anxious husband's rapid questions, "Countess Lichtenthal is progressing as favourably as could be expected," he said, adding, with a wave of his fat hand towards the Professor, "but, Herr Geheimrat von Weigand would wish to see the patient at once."

"If I may dare to ask such a favour," said the great doctor, bowing ceremoniously and screwing his eyes up to hide the twinkle of amusement that had flickered in them. Without waiting for any further permission the Grand Duke opened the bedroom door and led Weigand over to the low couch on which the injured woman was lying. She did not perceive them at first; but after a prolonged fit of trembling she shifted her position a little, and her strained eyes met those of her husband, who was gazing at her with an expression of the utmost tenderness.

"I have brought some one to see you, Amy," he said, bending over her, and speaking in a soft tone. She seemed to hear him, yet not to attach any meaning to his words. It was only when the Professor had sat down by the bed and had gently replaced the blankets she had thrown away from her tortured body, that she noticed the presence of a stranger. But soon his magnetic personality began to act upon her quivering nerves, and as if by magic gradually lifted her out of the abyss of depression into which she had sunk. Her laboured breathing grew quieter, directly the Professor placed his long narrow white hand upon her brow,

while the deep-drawn sighing moans ceased altogether. For the first moment since the accident the look of intense pain faded from her eyes, and in a little while they closed as though relief had come at last.

In the meantime Weigand had mastered all the details of the case from the elaborate clinical history which Engelbrecht had placed in his hands. He had also put a few short questions to the nurse who, dressed in the uniform of the Little Sisters of the Poor, stood in a respectful attitude of attention to answer them. Then, having satisfied himself upon the all-important matter of food and stimulants, the Professor asked his colleague to inquire if Dr. Ahmed had yet arrived. After an absence of a few seconds the Court physician returned, ushering in the sallow-faced young man, who still carried the bag from which he would, on no consideration, allow himself to be parted, and which he now set down on a small table by the side of his chief.

Without turning his head away from the patient, Weigand gave a whispered direction to his assistant. Ahmed at once opened the bag, and, after having washed his hands with even more than usual care, took from it a case of hypodermic syringes, together with several tubes containing minute white spheroids. He selected two of these small particles from different tubes, and dropped them into a measure of distilled water, which he had poured out from a bottle contained in the bag. While the stuff was dissolving he tested one of the syringes two or three times, and then proceeded to fill it with the solution. This done, everything was ready and Weigand motioned him to approach on the other side of the bed, and turning back the

blankets indicated a spot on the woman's arm that had escaped injury.

As Ahmed bent forward, and slowly inserted the needle under the skin, which he had first squeezed up between his fingers, his keen eyes fell for the first time on the face of Countess Lichtenthal. Meanwhile her husband had held himself a little aloof, silently marvelling at Weigand's placid self-possession — so different from the helpless anxiety of his own Court physician — and watching the wonderful effect mere contact with the great healer had produced. Neither he nor Engelbrecht nor the Sister of Mercy gave a thought to the busy assistant, regarding him only as the humble acolyte of this high-priest of medicine. But had they been looking at him, they would have seen a curious change come over his features. For on a sudden his dark half-shut eyes had flashed open to their utmost extent, while his mouth had been drawn aside with the startled expression of one who unexpectedly recognises a familiar face. It was, too, a look in which horror mingled with surprise; an involuntary evidence of some rapid association of ideas, that was suppressed as soon as the young man had regained control over his emotions.

III

As she swiftly sank into a deep restful calm bordering on sleep Countess Lichtenthal's breathing became less laboured and her pulse stronger. When Weigand saw that the desired effect had been produced, he wrote a few instructions for the guidance of the nurse and softly retired from the room, beckoning the others to follow him. Directly the door had been closed behind them the Grand Duke turned a gaze of mute appeal on the doctor, such as an innocent man might fix upon his judge; and, drawing him a little apart from the rest, asked him, as plainly as if he had spoken the words, "Is there any hope?"

The Professor, who felt that it would be cruel to stand on professional etiquette and keep him waiting till his opinion had been filtered through Engelbrecht, answered the unspoken question at once. "Unless something unexpected occurs I have no fear for the Countess's *life*." Notwithstanding the reservation implied by the stress laid on the last word, this news was so good that the distracted husband's overwrought mind reeled, as it were, because of the weight which had been thus suddenly lifted from it. He grew faint and cold, and would have fallen forward but for the Professor's outstretched arms. It was, as Weigand had foreseen, the after effect of shock upon a brave

man, whose every thought had been for another. He forthwith had the insensible Grand Duke carried to his bed, and ordered him, the moment consciousness returned, to swallow a glass of hot brandy and water in which a quantity of opium had been dissolved. Then, having ascertained that the Grand Duke's hand had already been dressed with solution of picric acid, Weigand gave strict injunctions that the dressing was not to be disturbed, and at last permitted his portly colleague to lead him down the great staircase of honour to the audience-chamber that had been hastily set in order for their consultation.

The tables that had been ranged round the room earlier were there no longer, but at the farther end of it there still stood the gigantic Christmas tree, its half-consumed candles clearly showing that the festivities had come to a premature close. The Professor glanced along the walls at the full-length ceremonial portraits in dull gold frames, set against a background of faded crimson silk, and up at the painted ceiling where a warlike form in a Roman toga was but dimly visible, as only the electric-light brackets beside the sculptured marble mantelpiece had been turned on. Then, walking towards the log-fire on the broad open hearth, he made an elaborate pretence of warming his hands. He keenly felt what a mockery the formalities of his calling must sometimes be; he knew that he was expected immediately to communicate his views to the man who looked at him with growing impatience, unable apparently even to frame an intelligent question. Yet, though the Hofrat indicated, by the uneasy shuffling of his feet and blinking of his heavy eyelids,

that he had many questions to put, Weigand said nothing, but turned his attention from the fire to the glimmer of grey light, which had begun to show through the eastern windows; his gaze next seemed for a time to wander thoughtfully round the heavy mouldings of the gilded cornice, then, as if by accident, to rest upon the strained features of his assistant. When, at length, he did speak it was to put a question himself. He addressed it to Engelbrecht, but directed a side glance of inquiry towards their silent junior, whose whole attitude betrayed intense anxiety to express an opinion.

"Will this poor lady retain her reason when she discovers that she has lost her good looks?" asked the Professor.

"Wer — wer — why not?" stammered the astonished Hofrat.

"That is precisely what I want to find out. Come, Engelbrecht, you know the patient's history. Are there not grounds for supposing that the loss would be a special calamity in this case?"

"I can only say, your Excellency" — it gave the pompous Court physician actual pain to call the son of a small apothecary by this exalted title — "that Countess Lichtenthal has always been greatly admired; but as the wife of our most gracious ruler she must feel herself above the considerations ——"

"Which influence all other women," interjected Weigand, in a tone of delicate irony. Then, turning abruptly to his assistant, he said: "And you, my friend, what do you think about it, eh?"

"I am of your opinion, sir," replied Ahmed, who

knew that the chief never spoke until he had arrived at one.

"Oh, are you, young man? Perhaps you have heard something that confirms my view, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Something your companions told you during the long drive here, eh?"

Ahmed nodded assent, without expressing the smallest wonder that Weigand had guessed the substance of what the others had told him, after his adventure with Sigurd had led them to talk about the dog's mistress. But Engelbrecht, unfamiliar with the marvellous intuition of a great original observer, was struck dumb with amazement. Still, in a vague way, he began to follow the Professor's line of thought. He called to mind that Countess Lichtenthal had been praised chiefly, if not solely, for her beauty; it was, therefore, probable that she would over-prize the quality by virtue of which she had held all who saw her spell-bound. For when an actress finds herself unable to reach the hearts of her audience, she must rely entirely on the grace of outline and brilliancy of colouring which give her an absolute sway over their eyes. Such a woman would naturally imagine that she was loved for her beauty alone. Was it not the force which had drawn men to her feet, and attracted the princely patron of dramatic art who had made her his wife? And what matter if she were utterly wrong in her imagination; what if it were evident that the Grand Duke had chosen her simply because she was the one woman he had ever loved? If she were obsessed with this fixed idea, how would she bear the blow

which robbed her of all that she valued most in the world?

There arose in his mind a vivid picture of the beautiful Amalia Paulli as he had seen her for the first time on the stage of the Court Theatre at Mittelburg. She had come specially from Vienna, to play in a great revival of "Maria Stuart." There had been diplomatic difficulties in the way, but Serenissimus had got over them. For the Paulli had exactly fitted with his ideal of the Queen of Scots, and though her classic features bore no particular resemblance to those depicted in the odd three hundred existing portraits of that much-painted lady, it was impossible to say that she might not be more like the fair original than any one of them. Five years had passed since that night, yet the Hofrat could well remember the sensation her appearance had created. In spite of her somewhat metallic voice, the charm of her manner and the dignity with which she moved had won rapturous applause from an audience that had the unenviable distinction of being the coldest and most critical in all Germany.

Perhaps her obvious success with their beloved Prince had made the loyal Thüringeners more enthusiastic than usual in their reception of the stranger. At any rate, Amalia Paulli had been in no hurry to return to the Hofburg; nor did it cause much surprise when she was released from her Vienna engagement in order to make the Grand Ducal capital her artistic home. And while she had found a host of flatterers, among whom the courtly Engelbrecht had been one of the most assiduous, she had also become a real favourite with the people. So that when, two years ago, an announce-

ment had appeared that she was about to retire from the stage, great and universal regret had been expressed, which had, however, turned to the liveliest satisfaction when the news of her approaching marriage with the Grand Duke was published. No one had ever grudged the Paulli her elevation to the rank of Countess, or her place nearest to their sovereign. Moreover, the tactful manner in which she had since filled that difficult position had added genuine affection to the regard all good citizens felt for the lady who stood so high, and yet was ever ready to lend a willing ear to the grievances of the lowliest in the land.

All that was essential of this Weigand had gathered from her appearance and the tone in which the Grand Duke had spoken of her, together with the sympathetic attitude of every one about the court. One danger he saw clearly to threaten this much-admired and much-loved lady; but, as yet, he did not quite see how that danger could be counteracted. The question presented itself, whether this were a risk which must be run, or whether means might be taken to avoid it. With that alternative in his mind, the Professor ignored Engelbrecht's blank stare, and, putting his head on one side with a quizzical air of inquiry, said —

"Well, young man, possibly you could suggest some way out of the difficulty?"

"If my opinion were seriously invited," said Ahmed, suppressing a passionate desire to impart his views.

"Oh, but it is!"

"Then I believe I could."

"I *thought* as much. Well?"

"To begin with," replied Ahmed, rapidly, "all

knowledge of her disfigurement should be kept from the patient until it has been removed."

"By natural processes?" asked the Professor.

"Assisted by the resources of surgery."

"Are you hinting at an operation?" said Engelbrecht, addressing himself to the speaker.

"That is what I recommend," answered his junior confidently.

"In the nature of skin-grafting?"

"Exactly."

"And may I be permitted to ask whether you realise that the patient could not withstand the removal of another inch of undamaged tissue?"

"I have taken that fact into consideration."

"Then how do you propose to operate, my friend?" the Hofrat asked, with an air of triumph.

"By obtaining the necessary material elsewhere."

"Your Excellency will scarcely sanction such a scheme?" said Engelbrecht, with a gesture which was at once expressive of deference to the great surgeon and repudiation of his assistant.

"I cannot say until I hear how our young colleague intends to carry it out," the Professor answered, in the impartial tone of one whose mind is open to conviction. "At present," he added, "I perceive two obstacles to its success. In the first place we are not so situated as to get the required material readily, though such a thing is, of course, easily managed in our clinic at Leipzig. Next, the patient would have to be held in a state of complete anæsthesia for several hours."

"I'd like to know how he hopes to do it!" said Engelbrecht, who was too disgusted at the unorthodox char-

acter of Ahmed's proposal to address this question to him directly.

"By means of an alkaloid we have recently been employing in our experiments."

"And what might that be?" inquired the Hofrat, his curiosity getting the better of his indignation.

"It is a secret — for the moment," Ahmed replied, with a side glance at his chief, which was answered by a smile of approval on the part of the great man.

Conscious of a hidden understanding between them, and angry at not being considered worthy to enjoy as much of the Professor's confidence as he entrusted to this youth, Engelbrecht burst into a frenzy.

"Ah!" he almost shouted, "*a secret;* then it matches well with the treatment of an *empiric!* But I will not allow you to experiment upon my patient, sir."

"Surely, that would be a matter for his Royal Highness to decide," said Weigand, in a quiet dry way which plainly warned the Hofrat that he must not exceed the authority vested in him as body physician.

The worthy man, his voice shaken with anxiety, replied, "Yes, yes, of course! But you would never countenance anything of the kind yourself?"

"That remains to be seen."

"And the use also of some new untried anæsthetic?"

"Possibly!"

"Then all I can say," said Engelbrecht, who still trembled with rage, "is that, if recourse to such methods is suggested, I retire from the case. I will not be a party to the practice of experimental surgery upon a fellow-creature. I shall make no official protest, out of respect for the eminent position you hold, Geheimrat

Weigand; but I ask your permission to withdraw myself from your deliberations." Then with a low bow to the Professor, he said, "I have the honour!" adding, with a curt nod to Ahmed, "your servant, sir." And as neither of them made any motion to detain him, he stalked majestically out of the room.

After a moment's pause the Professor shook his forefinger at Ahmed, and said, in a tone of mock reproach, "You see, young man, the disgrace into which you have got me with your enthusiasm for patching up wounded mortality. Do you think they are going to let you treat a countess with the same freedom as that mongrel cur you picked up in the road?"

"It would be best for her if they did."

"Perhaps; but how are we to convince her husband of that?"

"I believe I could convince him."

"Indeed! I am to leave you here in charge, then, and you will get his consent yourself, eh?"

"Yes."

At noon, when Dr. Weigand bade adieu to the Grand Duke, who had insisted on accompanying him to the carriage, his other patient was still sleeping. And though the Professor had paid her a second prolonged visit he had been careful not to disturb this most favourable condition. Acting under his direction, Ahmed had dulled the lower portions of the large mirrors in the Countess's bedroom, so that when she was lifted while her wounds were re-dressed, she could not possibly catch sight of her reflection in the glass.

Though the full effects of her injuries would only be

apparent after the contraction caused by healing had begun, it was important that she should know nothing of the distortion which was in progress. Moreover, as the thought of how she looked would probably be the first that occurred to her, directly her mind became once more normal, it would be necessary to reassure her on the subject at all costs. To this end her attendants were instructed to give satisfactory answers to any questions that she might put to them, and in no case to express sympathy on the score of her disfigurement. They were also strictly enjoined not to bring a looking-glass within the patient's reach under any consideration. Confident, therefore, that proper steps were being taken to avert the principal danger he had foreseen, the Professor was able to depart in far better spirits than he had arrived. Things were not, after all, so bad as they might have been, and if the Grand Duke's face were a true index to his mind, he would certainly listen to any sound argument. When Weigand had stepped into the low hunting-sledge that was to take him to the station, he laid his hand lightly on the Prince's right arm, and said, "Remember, you must take care of yourself, sir, and not be over anxious about Countess Lichtenthal. The worst should be passed in another thirty hours. After that the process of recovery will be slow, and conditions may arise which demand a somewhat heroic treatment. In the meantime I leave your Royal Highness in extremely skilful hands."

Having thus darkly shadowed forth his assistant's plan of action, he leant back in his seat, and the expectant driver of the troïka, who took this as a sign that he might start, immediately clapped on his Astrachan

cap, and, releasing his grip on a yoke of three eager horses, bore the Professor off across the snow-covered park, in the opposite direction to that by which he had come that morning. An hour afterwards Weigand hurried on to the platform at Mittelburg, just in time to catch the fast train for Leipzig.

IV

AFTER the Professor had departed, his pupil experienced an unaccustomed feeling of isolation. Ahmed had often watched alone by a sick-bed for days and nights together; but when evening came in the big silent palace he felt, as it were, cut off from all human sympathy. He knew that others waited within call ready to do his bidding; but they were strangers, unable to give that moral support which is to be derived from the mere presence of a friend.

During the greater part of his life Ahmed had been a solitary man, but of late he had grown to watch for the return of another. A woman had made herself necessary to him, and he longed to see her again now, with an impatience that was absolutely distressing to one who had hitherto been so self-contained. Yet they had lived in the same house and on the same floor for some time before he was aware of her existence. It all came back to him during these lonely hours of silent watching: how one sultry night in late summer, when nearly every one had deserted the town, his notice had first been attracted to her. On reaching the entrance-hall she had fainted, and when he let himself in soon afterwards he found her lying there. As it was obvious that she would be more comfortable and have more air in her own room, he had carried her up the six

flights of stairs that led to the third floor, and had placed her on a couch by an open window, having meanwhile summoned their good-natured landlady to her assistance.

Next day Frau Mänkel had been full of messages of thanks to Ahmed from his fellow-lodger. But he would not allow that the girl had the least ground for being grateful; he had only done what any one would have done in the circumstances. It had given him no particular trouble either, for she was not heavy, and bringing her upstairs had scarcely made him feel out of breath. Nevertheless, Elsa Hartvig became henceforth devotedly attached to the tall young surgeon, and the way in which he made light of the matter only increased her admiration for him. She was a romantic girl in spite of the rough training in the hospital, and being full of enthusiasm for her work looked upon a doctor as the greatest of heroes. She had, therefore, been interested in Ahmed ever since he came to occupy rooms on the other side of the landing; and though she had made no attempt to attract his attention, she had always hoped that the day might arrive when he would notice the slim figure in a grey gown which flitted past him so frequently on the stairs.

Now that by accident he had become conscious of her presence near him, Elsa thought that he must at last feel some desire to make her acquaintance. Nor would she have been mistaken in this, had Ahmed's thoughts not been engaged elsewhere, for the red-haired, pale-faced nurse was rather an attractive person, even at first sight. But the young man had looked upon her with eyes that saw nothing of her charms.

His mind had been full of the experiments he was conducting for Professor Weigand; the success of which proved that they possessed an anæsthetic more effective than any hitherto known. He had already performed operations under it which would have been impossible had the ordinary anæsthetics been used. As yet he had employed the new drug only on monkeys, dogs, rabbits, guinea-pigs, frogs, and animals of a low organisation, but soon the day might come when the Professor would permit him to try its effect on man. Indeed, he was growing so impatient that he had half made up his mind to experiment upon himself, if Dr. Weigand was not able to determine before long in what strength the injection might be given with safety. But even had his thoughts been less fully engrossed by his work, there would have been no room in them for Elsa Hartvig.

Chance had led him to take shelter one wet evening in a dingy little music-hall off the busy street through which he passed on his way home. And there, after he had sat a while in the thick reek of rank cigar smoke, taking no particular notice of the performers who followed one another on the stage, his attention had been suddenly arrested by the graceful dancing of a young woman dressed as a Russian gipsy. From that day he had been a frequent visitor to the third-rate place of amusement where she appeared, and the study of Mariska, as she was styled in the programme, had become with him an object of ever-increasing interest, to the exclusion of all other studies except that of physiology.

He had soon seen that she was under the influence of

her partner, a sturdy, ill-conditioned fellow, who played her accompaniments on a sort of zither, and whose name Ahmed afterwards learnt to be Mnischko. It seemed also that she was afraid of him; and, from the way in which she cowered whenever this man looked at her, the young doctor thought it probable that he beat her. Mariska, as she called herself, used to move about among the guests when she had finished singing, and she would drink with some of them; but her eyes turned each time for permission towards the scowling zither-player, who sat in a corner of the hall. After a few nights he perceived that not only were her movements entirely directed by Mnischko, but that by no chance was she ever allowed to come near him. This so irritated Ahmed that he determined to set to work to counteract the fellow's influence; a task which seemed easy to him since he had made special study of certain obscure psychic phenomena.

He had always found that, whenever he could get anybody to remain moderately still and to direct their gaze steadily on one point for several minutes, it was not hard to control their subsequent movements; if only his subject possessed the smallest capacity for mental concentration. Therefore one night, when Mariska took her stand on the little platform to sing, as soon as her accompanist had bent over his instrument to play the prelude, Ahmed made a gesture with the object of attracting her attention to the signet ring on his left hand. The manœuvre was successful, for during the whole of her song she kept her eyes glued on the stone, and only when the applause broke out at its conclusion did she look up with a troubled dazed

expression. That was the moment to see if he had obtained a hold over her. He drew his hand gently back towards him, putting the full strength of his will-power into the command he intended to convey, and waited. Ahmed had shut his eyes so that nothing should divert his mind, and for a long while he sat there in silence. At last he heard the sound of some one close to him breathing heavily, and, on opening his eyes, he beheld Mariska seated on the opposite side of the small table, leaning her elbows on it and resting her chin on her hands, so that her face was within a foot of his own. From that evening Mnischko's spell over her was broken. She would scarcely look at him, even when he was playing her accompaniments, and spent most of her spare time at Ahmed's table.

Frau Mänkel, being a widow, and no less romantic than Elsa herself, had seen how things stood between her lodgers, and had tried hard to awaken a feeling of sympathy in Ahmed for the girl.

"She comes home so tired," the good lady said to him, "they keep her standing for such long hours during the operations; and even in the wards she never has a moment to sit down. That's why she went off in a faint the other night, poor thing!"

"I know," he had replied, "it's hard work for any one who is not strong. But the Fräulein might do something else; she isn't obliged to be a hospital nurse; and, as long as she is one, it's no good complaining."

"Oh, she doesn't complain," said Frau Mänkel, "she is too fond of the work for that, and she is very clever at it, I am told."

"She told you so herself, I suppose."

"No, Herr Doctor, it was a friend of mine, the medical student Meyer, who lives on the fourth floor. He comes in for a cup of coffee sometimes, on the chance of seeing Fräulein Hartvig; he's a great admirer of hers."

"Is he really?" said Ahmed, without the smallest sign of being interested."

"Yes, indeed," continued Frau Mänkel, not to be silenced by this show of indifference. "But she pays no attention to him, will hardly listen to him even. No, her thoughts are engaged elsewhere."

"Ah, at the hospital. That is as it should be. Ours is an all-absorbing occupation, madam; we have no time to attend to anything else."

"Herr Meyer tells me that he *thought* he saw you at the Lustige Winkel one evening."

"Possibly he *did* see me. I have been there once or twice."

"Really, you surprise me, Herr Doctor; such a queer place, a mere tingel-tangel."

"Yes, it is rather a curious place; still, it amuses me more than your Crystal Palace."

"But that's quite respectable; a professor might go there."

"Ah, then according to Herr Meyer it is against medical etiquette to be seen at a tingel-tangel?"

"He didn't say as much."

"But he thinks it?"

"Well, yes!"

"Then why does he go to one himself?"

"He can do as he pleases; he is only a student."

"So am I, Frau Mänkel; we do not all cease to study

when we become doctors; and at present I am going through a post-graduate course at the Lustige Winkel. You understand?"

His amiable landlady did not in the least understand, but contented herself with smiling, and shaking her head somewhat sadly. There were many things she could not hope to understand about this stranger. Why was he never homesick, although he had no friends? Could it be that he did not care for any one in the whole wide world? These and a host of other questions she asked herself continually, without ever being able to answer them to her satisfaction, though she had thought of every sort of solution to the mystery. But, woman like, she respected Ahmed all the more for being able to keep his own counsel, and as yet had always left him to pursue his lonely way in peace. It was unwise, she felt, to worry him; he would only go elsewhere if she did. Elsa would be worse off than ever then. No; she must wait till he gets ill and she can nurse him, thought Frau Mänkel, who knew how weak men are when they feel the least unwell.

Late summer passed into early autumn, and autumn, in turn, gave way to winter, but neither fog nor frost laid the hardy hill-man up for a single day. Fräulein Hartvig had, therefore, no opportunity to prove her gratitude by nursing him through so much as a cold. Spring came, bringing the great fair, when the stalls overflowed from the Augustus Platz into the side streets, and the hotels were filled with strangers of all nationalities, and still the occasion for the nurse's services had not arisen. However, since we are all dependent sooner or later on the help of those about

us, the time at length came when Elsa could be useful to Ahmed.

Night after night, in spite of the widow's well-meant protest, Ahmed had gone to the Lustige Winkel. There, in the intervals between her songs, Mariska would sit by his side, sipping a glass of sweet wine. She had little to say on any subject that did not directly concern herself, but she was good to look at, her beauty being of no common order. Moreover, the evident pleasure she took in Ahmed's society flattered him, though he felt that it was only the outcome of suggestion, and no more due to any exercise of her own will than her changed attitude towards the musician. And before long he had convincing proof that this was indeed the case. She had of late been in the habit of going home alone after the performance. But one night, towards the end of May, she confided to Ahmed the fact that Mnischko, who, she said, was beside himself with rage, had taken to following her, and she begged the young man to see her safely back to her door. Of course he readily consented; and when she came down the long passage that led from the hall into the street, there, sure enough, stood the musician waiting under the great arc-lamp outside.

Some frequenter of the Lustige Winkel had given Mariska a half-bred dachshund, of which she seemed very fond. During the evening she would allow it to wander about the concert-hall, where it made many friends and no foes, except, perhaps, the cooks who had constantly to drive it out of the neighbouring kitchen. As usual, the dog came trotting out in front of Mariska,

turning to bark at her every moment in its joy at the prospect of a run. It sniffed at Ahmed in an inquiring fashion when he joined its mistress by the entrance, and it uttered a deep low growl of defiance when they passed Mnischko, who had slunk aside out of their way. On catching sight of her accompanist the girl clung to Ahmed's arm, apparently in a state of abject terror; and, from what she had told him of Mnischko's former cruelty to her, he was not surprised that she should stand in dread of this most sinister-looking person. For she had made no secret of the nature of their previous relations, nor of the hard life she had led with him.

As they walked on down the street they could hear the sound of footsteps that always kept at about the same distance behind them. More than once Mariska turned to Ahmed to warn him of the danger and to ask him if he were afraid. Even when the young doctor at last answered with a laugh that he had no fear, except on Mnischko's own account, as he had often been brought into close contant with enemies possessed of much greater cunning and strength, she did not seem quite reassured, but went on to say that she felt certain the man would do her a mischief one day. She hurried along, almost dragging Ahmed, who had no desire to elude pursuit in this undignified manner, with her; meanwhile the dachshund ran on before them and at times darted into the gutter to nose some tempting piece of garbage. They were just turning the corner when a huge Post-office van loomed in front of them, and there immediately arose the ear-piercing cry of a wounded animal. For the fraction of a second Ahmed

thought that his companion's apprehensions had been realised. Then, what had actually happened flashed upon him, and, bending forward, he picked up the dog's mangled body before the back wheel of the waggon could touch it, but not until after the front wheel had inflicted terrible injuries.

"Put him down," screamed Mariska; "he will *bite* you!"

"Nonsense," Ahmed replied calmly, "the poor little creature can recognise a friend, although he is maddened with pain."

"That's it," she cried in the same frenzied tone; "he is mad and he will bite you. Leave him alone, doctor, and some one will soon put him out of his misery."

Ahmed said nothing; indeed he seemed scarcely aware of the woman's presence until he had done all that was possible to alleviate the sufferings of her dog. But when he had placed a thick pencil between the animal's teeth and bound up its bleeding hind-leg in a white silk muffler that he had been wearing, he explained to Mariska that she must go home alone, as he would have to attend to the fractured limb at once. He thereupon hailed a passing drosky, and told the coachman to take a liberal fare out of his pocket and to drive Mariska to her lodgings as fast as the police allowed him. Having satisfied himself that Mnischko had fallen a long way behind, Ahmed bade the girl good-night and strode off with the dog in his arms. But, before he had gone very far, a feeling of regret at having been forced to leave her thus abruptly caused him to turn and look after her. What the young man

then saw sent a cold shiver through his whole body. Mariska had stopped the drosky a few yards farther on and was beckoning to the man from whom she had been flying a moment before in such terror.

Till Mnischko had mounted into the carriage beside the girl and they had driven off together, laughing loudly, Ahmed stood as though paralysed. Shaking off this feeling of utter helplessness, not without a considerable effort of will, he had hurried back to the Brüderstrasse, as quickly as the burden he was bearing with so much care would permit him. There a friendly night-watchman had opened the street door for him, using the doctor's own big house-key; but, being unable to unlock the door above, Ahmed had been obliged to push the electric bell with his elbow.

Frau Mänkel had gone to bed hours before. However, Elsa, who was sitting up reading, heard him ring, and went at once to open the half-glass door for him.

In the dim light of an oil lamp that hung in the hall she saw that he was carrying some live creature in his arms, which every now and then uttered a low moan of pain. Seeing also that he was prevented from doing anything himself Elsa first lighted the lamps in his sitting-room, and then fetched a large shovel of burning coals from the stove in hers so as to make up his fire. She next cleared away the cover and some books from a small wooden table, placed it under the light and spread a white cloth over it.

Ahmed had been long familiar with the rapid and business-like manner in which a well-trained nurse goes about her work. But he could not help admiring Fräulein Hartvig's quiet way of doing things. She

knew exactly what was wanted, and went to work without asking a single question. Having laid the crippled dog on the table with the utmost care Ahmed gently removed the blood-stained handkerchief from its mangled leg. The animal shivered as though it were cold, and its breath came in a series of quick short pants, but when the doctor withdrew the pencil, which its sharp teeth had nearly bitten through, it began immediately to lick his hand. With the aid of Elsa he succeeded in getting it to swallow some brandy. By this time the kettle she had placed on a spirit-lamp started to boil, and Ahmed was soon able to bathe the wounds with warm water in which a powerful antiseptic had been dissolved. When these had been thoroughly cleansed he gave the dog a strong dose of morphia, and set the leg as far as was possible at the time. He then placed the dog on a cushion near the stove, and, after thanking Elsa for her kindness, sent her off to bed, telling her to sleep soundly as he should want her assistance early next morning. There being nothing more to be done, the doctor stretched himself upon a sofa he had drawn up by the side of his little patient.

Before it was light the nurse crept softly back to relieve him from his watch, and as soon as Ahmed had washed and shaved and changed his clothes he hastened to the Augustus Platz in order to beg his chief to excuse him from attendance in the laboratory that morning. Although it was not yet seven o'clock he found Professor Weigand busily engaged in reading his voluminous polyglot correspondence and dictating answers to the less important letters which his secretary took down in shorthand. However, the great man did not show the

smallest sign of annoyance at being interrupted, and not only granted Ahmed's request, but also despatched a note to the resident surgeon at the hospital asking that Nurse Elsa might be given leave of absence for the day. After paying a short visit upstairs to see that the laboratory attendant did not neglect his charges while he was away, Ahmed returned to the Brüderstrasse in high spirits, bringing his instruments with him.

The doctor had no sooner finished breakfast than he took off his coat and put on a long waterproof apron. Meanwhile Elsa rolled up her sleeves and sterilised the instrument she was using for the operation in a big basin of boiling water. She also laid out some prepared gauze, rolls of linen, and small sponges, together with a heap of medicated cotton-wool on a side table within reach of her hand. Ahmed had by this time lifted the dog, which was still under the influence of the morphia, on to the operating-table. And observing with pleasure the unobtrusive interest of the nurse in his proceedings, he explained to her exactly what he intended to do.

In the ordinary way there would be no course open but the amputation of a limb so badly crushed. That, however, was not how he proposed to treat the case. He hoped to secure complete anæsthesia for several hours by injecting the dog with one-twentieth of a grain of the vegetable extract he had recently been employing in the laboratory. This would enable him completely to reduce the compound fracture, to draw the torn nerve tissues together, and manipulate the lacerated muscles into their normal position. It would be a most intricate and tedious business, in

which he would need all the assistance she could give him; but if they were successful and the dog had received no great internal injuries it would live to run about again. Though, to ensure this, he feared that a second operation would be necessary, since it was more than probable that the large bones would not reunite in the first instance.

Elsa's grey eyes sparkled and her pale face flushed with pride when he thus associated her in the success of his operation. She would have been delighted to help him in no matter how humble a way, but she was overjoyed at being allowed to participate in his work. She felt that her constant privilege of watching the greatest surgeon in the country was as nothing to that of waiting upon a look or anticipating a want of this young man.

When speaking of the operation afterwards, Ahmed always said that Elsa deserved most of the credit for its success. She had acted as a clever assistant rather than as a mere nurse; and he declared that, but for her, he would never have been able to make such a good job of it. Nor was it then only that she proved herself indispensable. For, as Ahmed had predicted, the thigh bone was so extensively damaged that a wide gap remained between the healthy portions through which they must be made to rejoin in order that the dog should have the use of its leg. The problem of inserting a fresh piece of bone and of inducing a new growth was, however, not one which presented the same difficulty to Ahmed as it might have done to most other surgeons. His most recent experiments in the Professor's laboratory had been directed to a study of

the localisation of functions; and for these he had been obliged to employ several highly organised animals, such as monkeys and dogs, in place of the more humble victims which it is the custom to sacrifice in the investigation of bacteriological phenomena. He, therefore, only had to wait until one of the dogs, which under the new anæsthetic had already been deprived of a considerable part of its brain, unfortunately succumbed to the shock of a further operation, to get the piece of living bone requisite for patching up the dachshund's injuries.

This time the young man did not explain to Elsa all the cruel necessities of the case, though she guessed, when she saw him sewing splinters of bone into the cavity, how they had been obtained, and in her heart she revolted at the injustice which condemned one creature to suffer for the benefit of another, or even for the welfare of the race. But to Ahmed it was sufficient that the animal destroyed had been spared all sensation of pain, and even Elsa rejoiced over the marvellous skill which he displayed in causing these widely separated sections of bone to grow together again and form once more part of a mobile limb. For this second operation proved a brilliant success, the report of which circulated through the hospital, and drew a compliment from the great Professor Weigand himself.

But if the preservation of the limb was due to Ahmed, it was Elsa who tended the dog during the long period that followed before he could be set at liberty; and she had no easy task to prevent him from scratching himself with his bandaged leg. To be sure, Ahmed helped her in this, taking alternate watches with her by the

basket in which the little dachshund was secured. He also devised a stiff leather case, which, while holding the limb in the required position, yet gave a certain degree of freedom of movement to the restless little creature.

At first the dog had to be kept under morphia and fed artificially; but when in time he was able to eat solids, Elsa found out how to tempt him with beef jelly and calves' liver and all those things which even a sick dog cannot resist. She it was who christened him Fritz, and who lavished upon him the maternal instinct that is always ready to manifest itself in every true woman. Ahmed, too, was no longer interested in the dog merely as a case, having grown to look on him as a companion. Fritz would lick his hand whenever he placed it within reach of the dog's delicate muzzle; and never showed the least inclination to snap at him when he touched the wounded limb. "His late mistress could not have known much about him," thought Ahmed, "or she would not have been afraid of his doing such a thing."

The doctor's face darkened at the recollection of the dancing girl, whom he had not seen, nor experienced any desire to see, since the night of Fritz's accident. What had happened on that night seemed to have blotted the woman out of his mind. Or could it be from another cause? Was the repulsion he had felt at her unfeeling conduct towards the dog and the wanton manner in which she had thrown herself in the arms of her former lover the only reason why she attracted him no more? At any rate he had not told Elsa to whom Fritzchen belonged. It was better that

she should regard him as a stray cur picked up in the gutter; she would prize him all the more, because he had no value for others.

The mongrel accepted Elsa's attentions with complacence, though directly he ceased to be dependent on them he attached himself exclusively to Ahmed. Dog like, when at length the leather case was removed from his leg, he acknowledged one master, and crawled about after Ahmed in an ecstasy of mute devotion. Still Elsa could not blame Fritz for being dominated by the doctor's masterful personality, and she felt very grateful to him for having brought them together. But one evening Herr Meyer, who had heard about the operation from Frau Mänkel, called in to see for himself how it had succeeded, and immediately recognised Fritz as the identical little brown dog that he had observed following one of the performers about at the Lustige Winkel.

"You couldn't remember a dog you had only seen once," said Elsa.

"I saw it on several occasions," he replied, "and I should know it again anywhere. Why, I have bought it a sausage more than once, out of regard for its mistress, Mariska, the Russian dancer. Now I think of it," he added, "she was rather friendly with the doctor. No doubt that's why he gave himself so much trouble about the dog."

"You must be mistaken, Herr Meyer," Elsa protested indignantly.

"Yes, perhaps I am, Fräulein Hartvig," said the young man, mournfully, after looking at her straight in the face for a little while.

"Ahmed does not trust me," she thought, when the medical student had gone. "He believed I should be jealous of that woman, and he was right; I am jealous of her; I was, the first time I heard of her, months ago, from Frau Mänkel."

"Ah, Fritzchen," she said, addressing herself to the dog, "you could tell me whether she loved him. You could tell me — But no, you could tell me nothing. You are his dog now, and you must keep his secrets."

She had knelt down beside Fritz, putting her arms round his neck, and he had gazed up at her with his great dark eyes, searching, yet inscrutable as those of all dumb animals are. At that moment Ahmed had softly entered the room, and Elsa was not aware of his presence until he spoke.

"One might almost fancy that you were asking Fritz some question," he said, noting her eager look of inquiry.

"I was," said Elsa, rising swiftly from her knees, not a little confused at being surprised in such an attitude by Ahmed.

"You did not expect the dog to answer it, Fräulein Hartvig?"

"No. Fritz is as clever as his master at keeping things close," she replied.

"Ah," he said, with a laugh, "that is a good point in him, and he hasn't many, poor beast. But do I gather that his master has offended by concealing something which ought to have been communicated?"

"Yes!"

"Indeed? What could that be?"

"You ought to have informed me that Fritz was the property of some one else."

"Well," replied Ahmed, smiling at the seriousness with which she said this, "I told you he was not mine, so that he must have belonged to some one else; and as long as no one claims him ——"

"But any day she might," said Elsa, quickly, with a reproachful glance.

"Ah, you know who Fritz's owner was, then?"

"Yes, and when he is quite well again, I suppose you will take him back to her."

"No; I do not think she'd care for him now that he is lame."

"She must be very heartless then."

"Perhaps," Ahmed said, rather sadly.

"But of course she is so pretty that no man would ever find it out," said Elsa, with a bitter laugh.

"Until it was too late, eh?"

"You were fond of this woman?"

"No!"

"But you went to that place to see her night after night."

"Yes, she interested me."

"She fascinated you, you mean."

"It is possible."

"And she does still," Elsa continued, with an accent of intense excitement, coming close to him, and looking into his eyes: "she will lure you back."

"I think not," Ahmed answered calmly. "But what matter if she did?"

"It would matter a great deal to me," Elsa replied in a low earnest tone, her breathing becoming rapid and short.

"Elsa!" he exclaimed hoarsely, taking her in his arms, and drawing her towards him.

She made no more effort to escape from him than when he had lifted her limp form from the ground that night she fainted, but this time she trembled with the consciousness of his embrace. "I could not bear to lose you now, Ahmed," whispered Elsa, as she raised her hands and passed them gently down his dark straight hair until they rested together on the back of his neck. Her caress caused a wave of pleasure to rush along the young man's tense nerves. This son of an austere race, who believe themselves descended from the lost tribes of the children of Israel, had never given full play to his emotions before. It was not the custom of his people: even in war, their great pursuit, some thing would be held back, a reserve of force against some desperate emergency; and he had been taught to look on love as a childish sport, well enough for Kafirs who took to themselves but one wife. Besides he had been always busy striving after that which his fathers had ever valued most — knowledge. But now, in a moment, he had lost self-control; his body shook as though with fear. This woman had subjugated his reason, intoxicated his senses with the warm perfume of her breath, the glitter of her red-gold hair, and the soft pleading of her voice. Ahmed bent his head down, till his face nearly touched hers; he tried to tell Elsa that he cared for her as he had never cared for any other woman, but the words refused to form themselves in his strained throat. He could only clasp her more tightly in his arms and gaze at her harder than before; but when their lips met he closed his eyes.

V

After that kiss they were transported into a new world, in which the one shadow was Elsa's dread that Frau Mänkel would discover their secret. She had given herself freely to this man, and felt full of joy at having won his love, for whatever changes time might bring she was sure he loved her then. Her only fear was that they would be separated, that the good woman with whom they were living would not let them both stay. And they could not leave together without everybody knowing what they were to one another. Elsa thought of the Pfarrhaus in the little village near Königsberg, where the old ladies would shake their heads at the mention of her name when they sipped their afternoon coffee with the parson's fat wife; of the church bells that would not ring for her if ever she went back to be wed; and of the rough hands that would pluck off her myrtle wreath. All this must happen once the other nurses heard that she and Dr. Ahmed were *friends*. A bitter resentment, born of envy, would be aroused within them, making it their solemn duty to publish her shame. But as long as he and she could remain where they were no one need suspect that there was anything between them, and no one would write the letter which must alter the face of home for her.

Meanwhile Elsa went about her work at the hospital as usual, but with a radiant look of happiness in her eyes that caused her fellow-nurses to nudge each other and smile. If she was on day duty she would hurry back to the Brüderstrasse with a light, quick step, in spite of the long hours in the wards and the operating-theatre. And on a fine evening, when she had changed her dress, she would sit with Ahmed, listening to the regimental band in a lamp-lit concert-garden where Fritz would hobble after them, and claim a share of their supper, eaten under the lime-trees.

Frau Mänkel was not blind to the change that had come over her lodgers; but she liked the young doctor and the lonely girl too well to show that she noticed any difference in them. It is always better to leave lovers alone, the romantic creature told herself. They are shy birds, and the spring-time is so short. To her it was pure delight to watch the new found pleasure these young people took in the company of one another, and she had not the least wish to know more. What their plans for the future might be was not her business; it was enough for her that, for the moment, they were happy. Nor did she forget that when one is young one does not plan and scheme as one must do when one is old. But though the amiable widow kept her own counsel, she found occasion before long to show Elsa that she still bore her a good heart. For one evening when the nurse asked her if Herr Meyer had paid her a visit lately, Frau Mänkel said that she had not seen the medical student for some days, and that she doubted if he would come again. And on Elsa's

inquiring why she thought that, she admitted that she had asked him not to call.

"It arose through a remark of his about the doctor," she said, "something disparaging about his treatment of Fritz."

"Oh," said Elsa, with a contemptuous smile, "you need not have minded what he said about that, if Geheimrat Weigand is satisfied."

"Yes, yes, I told him so; but it didn't convince him. I fear he has taken a dislike to Dr. Ahmed," the widow said, beaming through her spectacles at Elsa, "and perhaps he has some reason I know nothing about. At any rate, I thought it just as well that for the present he should not come here again."

Suddenly Frau Mänkel's friendly, weather-stained face, with its frame of smooth, white hair, grew indistinct to Elsa as she reached forward to grasp those strong, rough hands. But through the haze which had spread itself over her eyes, she could see the good soul's kindly purpose.

"You gave up seeing your friend for my sake," she said, "because you were afraid he might talk about me at the hospital."

The older woman did not reply in words, but by a gentle pressure of the girl's fingers let her understand that she had guessed the reason of this small sacrifice.

Henceforth Elsa Hartvig was free from all apprehension; for she knew that if Frau Mänkel remained her friend it would prevent people from gossiping. Indeed, there was nothing to set their tongues wagging. Neither she nor Ahmed neglected any duty they had to perform; Elsa was as regular as ever in her attend-

ance at the hospital night or day, and he was always in his place, no matter how early or late the Professor might want him. Each morning at eight o'clock he would march off to the Augustus Platz with Fritz at his heels, and he never thought of leaving the laboratory until that day's work had been finished and every preparation made for the next. So that it was often midnight before Elsa caught the sound of his firm footstep on the stairs, preceded by the scuffle of the dog's returning feet. Yet she was well content, since, outside his work, he belonged to her alone. The presence of Fritz was a proof that he had been nowhere else than to Professor Weigand's, or at least that he had not been to the one place she dreaded; for he was too fond of the dog to take him there, and run the risk of his being claimed. Elsa was still jealous of the woman she had never seen; so much so that she had gone out of her way many times to read the programme exhibited under a wire screen near the entrance to the Lustige Winkel; and one day she was delighted to see that the name of Mariska had disappeared from it. The creature had gone away then, she thought, to practise her wiles on other men. And, with the sublime selfishness of love, she cared not how much they might suffer, so long as Ahmed was safe, though by this time Elsa could have trusted him not to look at any one but herself.

Summer had come again, making the city one great furnace. But there were shady spots within easy reach of it, and as the University was not turning out the manufactured article all the year round, Professor Weigand had ceased to lecture for a while. Nor were

the hospitals running at full pressure, since even surgeons must sometimes take a holiday. Thus every now and then Ahmed and Elsa were able to get away for the afternoon. They would take the train out to one of the less frequented pleasure resorts, and walk up into the pine woods till they reached some picturesque lookout place, where they got glimpses of the distant country.

On such expeditions the fine air of the hills brought a flush of health to the nurse's pale cheeks, and her eyes grew brighter as they drank in the fresh beauty of the forest. Seeing how she loved nature, Ahmed told her about his own country; the great mountain ranges whose peaks were wrapped in everlasting snow, and the fertile well-watered valleys that were famous for their fruit. But when Elsa declared that nothing would please her more than to see the wide gorges and narrow defiles he had described, he became silent. And after a while he explained that, for his part, he had given up all hope of seeing them again. The knowledge he had acquired would be of little use to him in that wild land, even if it were not a source of danger. Mullah and Hakim would alike be envious of his superior wisdom, though both professed that nothing was to be learned which the Prophet had not written. He had noticed the sidelong way in which they regarded him when he went back there with the Professor. Besides, what was to be done with people who persisted in bleeding for every sort of malady, and who thought honey a sovereign specific? No, Ahmed would not care to leave his Western friends now. If he had been called upon to sit in the place of his father,

it would be different; then he might have done some good, might have used his experience to some purpose. But as things were, his own brother would look on him as an enemy. And he would do better to remain abroad.

Elsa was delighted to hear him say this, for with the natural anxiety of love she had foreseen a day when Ahmed would long to return to his own people. She did not realise, at first, that he was as completely cut off from his kinsfolk as she was from hers.

They were utterly alone in the world, these two; and, as the months went by, they became more and more absorbed in each other, so that there was scarcely a thought they did not share in common. Elsa, though the least exacting of women, yet possessed the faculty of her sex for occupying a man's whole attention, and it seemed to Ahmed that there was no room in his mind for any one else.

One day, however, early in October, Herr Meyer met him on the stairs, and contrary to his custom of late, did not pass by with a curt nod, but stopped to talk.

"Have you heard the news?" began the medical student, who had evidently watched for an opportunity to tell him something.

"What news?" said Ahmed.

"Why, about your friend Mariska, of course," replied the other.

"No; what of her?" Ahmed asked in a tone of utter indifference.

"It appears that she has been mixed up in killing some one."

"Not that fellow Mnischko!" exclaimed the doctor, suddenly becoming interested.

"With his help, they think. Anyhow, they have both been arrested. There is an account of it in the evening paper. I fancied you would like to know about this, so I brought mine down for you to see," said Meyer, handing him a copy of a local evening edition, which he had been turning over in his fingers while he spoke.

"Thank you," said Ahmed in a hoarse voice, taking the paper. "It is very friendly of you, Herr Meyer."

"Not worth mentioning between neighbours," the student replied, then with a bow he said, "I take my leave, Herr Doctor," and turned to go upstairs again.

"Adieu!" said Ahmed politely, looking hard at the paper he held in his hand, but without being able to read a word of it. The whole of the type on the page seemed slowly to twist itself into one confused mass, out of which he could make nothing. Doubtless it was all printed there, the account of what had happened, and the reasons why suspicion had fallen on this wretched pair. Whether these were justified against Mnischko he cared not, but if the woman were guilty Ahmed felt that he also was to blame. For had he not abandoned her to the influence of that man? *He might have saved her!* This was an idea that gradually became a settled conviction with him. He had known Mariska's shallow nature to be singularly open to suggestion, for good or ill, and yet he had made no effort to rescue her from evil surroundings. An ardent desire to save his fellow-creatures from suffering was the keynote of Ahmed's character. He had the born

physician's love of healing for its own sake, and it cut him to the quick to think that he had lost a case, as it were, through negligence.

But he remembered that something might still be done to prevent her from being condemned; money would help, no doubt, and he had plenty at command. Ahmed's brain was so busy with these thoughts that he had not moved from the spot where Meyer had met him, when Fritz, who had no such preoccupation, had gallopped upstairs and begun to scratch furiously at Frau Mänkel's door. Elsa waited a moment for the familiar footstep that ought to have followed, and then hastened out of her room to let the dog in, wondering what could possibly have brought Fritz home before his master. All of a sudden a feeling of alarm took hold of her, and she fancied that some accident must have happened to Ahmed. Instinctively she leant over the balustrade, peering down the staircase; and a little way below she saw him standing quite still. When she called to him softly by name, he gave a start of surprise, looking almost dazed for the moment. But he pulled himself together directly, and came on up the stairs towards her. As soon as she had lighted the lamp in the sitting-room, she perceived that his face was a shade paler than usual, and again she began to fear that he might have met with an accident, something he was afraid to tell her about. The dangers of the Physiological Laboratory were well known to Elsa; she could appreciate the constant risk of infection from some deadly bacillus that the workers in it ran every day of their lives. Her mind being, therefore, filled to overflowing with horrors, she looked anxiously at

the young surgeon and, in a faltering voice, asked him if he were hurt.

"No," he answered, with an attempt at a smile; "what makes you ask?"

"There is something the matter, Ahmed; I can see it."

"Well, yes, there is something, and I suppose I must tell you, since you would only think it a great deal worse than it is, if I didn't," Ahmed said, putting one arm round her waist and stroking her chin with his other hand. Soothing her thus, as one might pacify a child, he led her towards the sofa and set her down beside him. Then, placing the paper in her hand, he pointed to the part of it which Herr Meyer had marked with red ink, and said —

"Read that!"

Elsa did as he told her, reading aloud, while he leant back and listened. But for some time she could not understand either the drift of what she read or its bearing upon Ahmed.

The newspaper reporter, who tried to make his account of the murder as complete as possible, had begun it with a description of the finding of the body. This opening incident in the Zwirnau Drama, as he called it, had occurred in the baggage-hall of the railway station at Mittelburg. A faint odour had drawn the attention of one of the porters to a big trunk which had remained unclaimed for two or three days. He had communicated the fact to his superiors, and they in turn had summoned the assistance of the police, who at once proceeded to break open the box. In it they had discovered the body of a corpulent but vigorous man, whom the medical authorities pronounced to

have been strangled. The corpse was in the initial stages of decomposition and it was clothed in a dark suit made by a Hamburg tailor, the pockets of which had been emptied. But on particulars being telegraphed to Hamburg they were said to tally with the description of a certain Herr Giesecke, a wholesale dealer in novelties, who had been paying an annual visit to his clients in the neighbourhood of Dresden, and who had been expected home for some days. Giesecke's wife, alarmed by not hearing from her husband, had informed the police of his unaccountable absence, adding, in confidence, that she feared her husband was addicted to low company. This had been corroborated to some extent by the Chief of the Dresden Police Bureau, who reported that the Hamburger had been known to his men as a frequenter of one of the smaller concert-halls in a quarter which was under constant observation, but that he had been gone from the city for over a week.

The writer then launched out into a panegyric on the police of Germany, where the detection and prevention of crime had been so scientifically co-ordinated that there was no loophole of escape. So in the case of this unfortunate merchant, unseen eyes had followed him from the moment he took his ticket at the Leipziger Bahnhof in Dresden up to the night when he failed to return to his room at the Black Eagle in Zwirnau. And in less than twenty-four hours the police had found out that Giesecke left the hotel about nine o'clock; and was observed to make his way across the Marktplatz towards the Klostergasse, down which he disappeared. Attached to a beer-restaurant in this

narrow street was a long room in which minor music-hall artistes from time to time gave isolated performances, and for that evening the proprietor had announced, as a special attraction, the appearance of the famous Russian dancer Mariska.

From this point Elsa's curiosity was aroused and she read on eagerly.

The Hamburger entered the Hall and took his seat at a table, where he was joined soon by the dancing girl whose acquaintance he had made at Dresden. Presumably he had come to Zwirnau for the sole purpose of seeing her again, since the business he might do in so small a town could not have justified his visit. Be that as it may, the restaurant-keeper acknowledged that he had welcomed the arrival of Mariska's rich admirer, who had ordered champagne and in every way behaved like a true cavalier. He had also been glad to see that the woman's partner, Mnischko, paid no particular attention to the pair, but was content to sit with him in a corner drinking numerous glasses of local beer, and grumbling at the badness of trade. When the performance was over Mnischko sat on with the host discussing the ruin that socialism had brought upon the country. For political agitation, he declared, caused working men to crowd into stuffy halls to hear demagogues and to waste on them the money that they might have spent on art.

The fellow had not forgotten this conversation because he remembered pointing out that these people didn't save anything even for beer, since it all went nowadays in talk and tobacco. Mariska and her companion, he was sure, had left the place earlier,

having driven off together in a closed drosky. The driver had stated that he took them to the end of an alley near the city wall, and that there the woman had got out of the carriage. She had stood for some minutes talking in a whisper to her friend inside, and then turning abruptly away had gone down the dark passage. "To the Black Eagle," the man had shouted. But before the horse's head was round he had jumped out, handed the driver a two-mark piece, and started off after the woman.

That was the last the police had been able to learn of Herr Giesecke in this life. But the writer had gathered that their theory of what had happened afterwards was founded on the strongest circumstantial evidence. They supposed that the deceased had overtaken Marie Schüler, for such was the dancer's real name, and accompanied her to her apartments in the upper part of a dilapidated house, backing on to the old wall. It is as lonely a spot as could be found anywhere in the crowded town, and obviously the merchant went there against his better judgment. At least, such was the interpretation placed upon that long whispered colloquy at the carriage door. Nevertheless the large room upstairs to which she conducted him could not have presented a very forbidding appearance, for Giesecke seems to have been quite at his ease there, since he lighted a cigar and seated himself in an armchair near the stove. No doubt Marie did her best to make him feel at home, and was probably sitting on his knee, when Mnischko stole silently into the room. The street door had purposely been left ajar, and the man must have taken off his boots before coming up

the stairs; for the old couple to whom the house belonged, and who lived in the basement, only heard two people pass their bedroom that night, and naturally believed them to be Marie and her husband coming home together. At all events, Mnischko must have entered without disturbing the merchant, for he had evidently succeeded in throwing a noose over Giesecke's head and drawing it tightly about his throat before the wretched man could utter a sound. What followed might never be exactly established, but so much is certain; the murdered man was robbed of everything he had about him, even the studs out of his shirt being taken. He was then lifted into a large, imitation American-trunk, which Mnischko had purchased second-hand from a broker in the town that day. As he was very heavy it had probably required two people to effect this, and considerable force must have been used in pressing the body down into the box, so that the lid could be made to shut. Next day a street porter conveyed the box to the station, where jocular remarks were exchanged about its weight: but no sort of suspicion having arisen in the mind of any one it was despatched along with the strollers to Mittelburg.

There they had abandoned it, hastening westwards in order to put the greatest possible distance between them and its ghastly contents. And, as they were in possession of ample funds taken from their victim, had it not been for the prompt action of the officials, they would certainly have escaped to America. Four days later, however, the man and woman had both been arrested in the act of stepping on board a steamer at

Bremerhaven, and brought back to Zwirnau, where they were now awaiting trial.

"Oh, Ahmed!" Elsa cried, letting the paper fall and throwing her arms about his neck, "they might have killed you."

"It would have scarcely been worth their while," said the doctor, with a grim smile. "I do not carry large sums of money on me like a merchant. Neither do I drink wine that deadens the senses. Herr Mnischko could not have taken me by surprise so easily as he did the man from Hamburg. Besides," he added thoughtfully, "Mariska would have warned me."

"I wonder you believe that after what you have just heard about her," said Elsa, quickly.

"When I was a boy in my father's house," began Ahmed, in a calm, matter-of-fact tone, "Nasrullah, my elder brother, was angry because he feared I might, if I grew up straight and strong, be chosen in his place, although his mother was my father's chief wife. So one day he loosed a young she-tiger into the room where I slept. She was a fierce creature except to him who had reared her; but when my people came they found me playing with her, as a child will with a kitten, and from that day she was tame only with me. Then Nasrullah ordered her to be killed, though she had been a great favourite."

"I would rather trust myself to the mercy of a tigress than to that of a dangerous woman," said Elsa, not in the least convinced by his illustration.

"Perhaps you would be right, my treasure," replied Ahmed, smiling again in the same bitter manner; "women have very little mercy for one another."

"You think she would not be dangerous to you?"

"I know it!"

Ahmed then went on to explain how his own experiments on Mariska led him to believe that she had acted under the influence of Mnischko. But Elsa would not agree that an ignorant person like this could have exerted sufficient brain force to displace entirely the will of another. She did not, however, argue the point any further, since she soon found out that Ahmed was fully persuaded of the woman's innocence. It was only when he told her that he intended to go to Zwirnau next day the she ventured to protest.

"What could you possibly do there?" she asked.

"Secure an advocate for her," he answered.

"That might be done by writing."

"No. I must see Marie Schüler myself."

"Ah!" exclaimed the nurse, starting away from him with an involuntary movement of disgust.

"That is to say, if I can," he continued quietly, making no effort to retain her. "I must have her consent before I engage a lawyer to defend her."

Elsa moved towards him again and placed her head on his shoulder; then, looking up at him with a resigned expression, she said: "It is very good of you to take all this trouble about the poor thing, Ahmed."

"It is the least I can do after having failed her, when she needed my help, and, after all, I suppose one ought to do as much for a human being, as one would for a dog!" he said, leaning down and patting Fritz's smooth brown coat, an action which provoked the dachshund to scramble up on to the sofa by his side and to lick his face.

"*He* belongs to her," said Elsa, with a deep sigh, looking at Fritz regretfully.

"Yes," Ahmed replied, "and I have no doubt he would speak a good word for her if he could, in spite of her wanting me to leave him to die that night."

"You never told me that, Ahmed."

"No; it is one of the things about her that I would rather forget."

"Was she acting under the influence of some one else then?" Elsa asked slowly, with a touch of malice in her tone.

"She was under the influence of *fear*, an emotion that has been the cause of many a cruel deed."

"You don't mean that I am jealous of this woman?" said Elsa, lifting her head and looking at him defiantly.

"You behave as though you were," said he, with a frown which made her drop her eyes, in dread that she had angered him beyond forgiveness. "But," he added in a lighter tone, quickly relaxing his furrowed brows, "you have no reason to be."

Then drawing her towards him in his strong arms, he bent over her and kissed her white throat, so that she was afraid no more.

VI

AHMED was unable to leave Leipzig next day, because the Professor could not spare him, but on the morning after he set out early for Zwirnau. And when he arrived he found that sleepy mediæval town to be still in a ferment of excitement over the murder. The first person he met informed him that Marie had been lodged in the new prison, and offered to conduct him to that part of the Castle, but begged him to go by way of the city wall in order to pass the house where the deed had been perpetrated. This self-appointed guide appeared quite hurt at his refusal to visit the actual scene of the crime, though he, nevertheless, led the doctor up the winding road to the fortress, and only took leave of him at its gates, after politely pointing out the prison building. On reaching this, Ahmed remembered that he was scarcely provided with the credentials to secure admittance to the prisoner. By a happy inspiration, however, he hit upon the idea of asking for the prison doctor; and before long a plump, sleek little man, of a pronouncedly Jewish type, came tripping into the hall, holding Ahmed's card in his hand. Dr. Meissener, who found life unendurable in Zwirnau, had been on the eve of taking his holiday when the accused persons had been suddenly thrust upon him. Otherwise, there was no prisoner of im-

portance, this not being a convict establishment; but, with the appearance of these two his chance of spending Christmas in Berlin had vanished. Could it be possible that his Leipzig colleague was willing to fill his place temporarily? All this the little man stated with the utmost volubility, not allowing Ahmed to speak a single word; and, having at length come to an end, seemed much disappointed when he politely regretted his inability to do this. "To what, then, am I indebted for the honour?" he inquired, with an accent of disillusion. On Ahmed's explaining the purpose of his visit, the prison doctor declared that it would have given him the greatest pleasure to oblige; but — and, with a tremendous shrug of the shoulders, he had conveyed the utter impossibility of what was asked. Ahmed did not intend to be put off thus, without making a desperate effort to attain his object, and he was not slow to take advantage of the hint his colleague had let fall. Therefore, drawing him a little on one side, he said, in a confidential tone: "If it is a question of the woman's health that keeps you here, perhaps I might be of assistance."

"How so?" asked Meissener, rapidly turning a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles upon him.

"At any rate, you would have no concern on the man's account"?

"None whatever; he is not in the least likely to cheat the Scharfrichter."

"But of course a woman subject to violent hysteria requires close attention."

"How do you know she is hysterical?"

"I told you, Doctor Meissener, that I had studied

her case. Shall I tell you what has happened since she has been in your charge?"

"Oh, please," said the little man, with an incredulous smile. "*Clairvoyance* is always interesting."

"Well," replied Ahmed, undisturbed by the other's tone of orthodox contempt for anything of an occult nature, "for the first twelve hours the woman remained in a dull stupor, out of this she passed into a rage that lasted until her strength was exhausted, when she fell to sleep, and since then she has gone at short intervals from one fit of rage into another."

"Merciful heaven, yes!" exclaimed the astonished doctor. "You are right! She has behaved like a freshly caged wild beast most of the time. And I can do nothing to stop her. Our regulations do not permit me to administer drugs unless a prisoner is ill."

"That is what I meant," Ahmed answered, "when I said I might be able to help you! Suppose I could quiet this woman without breaking your rules?"

"Ah, if you could do that you'd save me a lot of trouble. But how?"

"I am not prepared to say yet, only I pledge my professional reputation that she will cause you no further anxiety, after I have seen her."

"Agreed," said Meissener. "You shall! You will see her in my presence, of course, and anything you wish to give her must be inspected by me."

"Oh, you need not be afraid," Ahmed replied, with a fine smile. "I do not want to poison her; I have come to save her life."

"You have a hard task before you then, if all I hear about the murder is correct," said Meissener, chuckling

as he turned to lead him up to the infirmary where Marie had been placed under the charge of a female attendant. Their entrance to the room came as a surprise to both its inmates, for the doctor had unlocked the door with his pass key. The woman on guard, however, on hearing the hinges grate, put down her knitting, and was about to move, when Meissener stopped her with a gesture. Marie, who had stood on tiptoe, reaching up to the iron bars of the window, turned away from it after a little while, with a deep sigh. She had been in one of her calmer moods, but the sight of the prison doctor threw her into a fresh paroxysm. "Ah," she cried, "you have come back again to blink at me with your beads of eyes, you little black pig!"

"Pigs are lucky, my child," he said good-humouredly.

"Not when they squint at one, as you do," said the woman, extending her hand towards the doctor with two fingers elevated, as though to ward off the evil eye. "It is by your orders that I am watched by the pig-dog there," she continued, pointing to the placid attendant, who visibly writhed under this unforgivable insult.

"It is no good abusing Fräulein Finke," the doctor said; "she does not wish to remain, I am sure!"

"Indeed, I do not," said the offended woman.

"And if you cannot be left to yourself it is your own fault."

"You will say next that it is my fault I am here at all."

"That is as may be," said Meissener, with a careless shrug of the shoulders, and an accompanying movement of both hands. "At any rate it is not *mine;* and

you have no reason to be angry with me just now. I have brought you a friend."

Up to then Marie had taken no notice of the doctor's companion, believing him to be simply an assistant from the prison infirmary. But when Meissener alluded to him in these terms she advanced a few steps nearer to Ahmed.

"Oh," she said, failing to recognise him, "another of your Ghetto breed!" There was perhaps much in his appearance to justify her mistake. His glossy straight black hair, full lips, and olive skin gave him a somewhat Semitic aspect. Coming forward a little, he looked into her eyes with a fixed stare; and though she had already opened her mouth to hurl some insult at him, she uttered no sound. He gazed at her thus for less than a minute, and then took one step backwards. Immediately she made a similar step towards him, and when a moment after he advanced two or three steps, she retired before him in the same way. Doctor Meissener, who was much nearer to Marie, bent forward to look at her closely, but she paid not the slightest attention to him. As he looked, her eyeballs rolled upwards out of sight, and her eyelids quivered gently together, while the muscles of her throat made a curious swallowing movement. When Ahmed pointed to a chair, she walked straight to it and seated herself without once opening her eyes. He then began to speak to her in a slow impressive manner, but in a dialect which Meissener, though by no means a poor linguist, could not understand. Ahmed had first learnt Russian from the Cossack escort of the various distinguished soldiers who came from time to time to

his country on hunting expeditions, so that he was able to talk to Marie in the tongue her mother had taught her as a child, one that the smattering of many languages she had acquired in her vagrant life had not caused her to forget.

"You have been unwell, Mariska?" he said in Little Russian, glancing at his colleague's face to see if the words conveyed any meaning to him. "You have been badly used, moya gorlitschko?"

"Yes, yes!" Marie answered, in a deep low voice.

"Has any one here ill-treated you?" he said, standing back so that Meissener, who was still gazing eagerly at the woman, should not observe how closely he watched him.

"No; they have not been unkind; it was the people outside who frightened me, the men who howled and the women who shook their fists at me. They made me afraid on the way here from the railway, and I was glad to be inside these walls for a time, till the thought came that I should only leave them once again alive."

"You must dismiss that thought from your mind, Mariska." Ahmed put an immense depth of meaning into these words, which he intended as a suggestion that the woman would be forced to obey. He had satisfied himself while Marie was speaking that the prison doctor, who no doubt knew some Russian, was utterly unable to follow anything they said.

"For the future you will dwell only on such pleasant memories as may help you to bear your captivity in patience. And when the hour of your trial comes you will say nothing, except that you are innocent. You will answer no question, either at that or any other

time; nor will you speak to the people in this place more than is necessary. Think of the men who have loved you, and of the women who have hated you, Mariska. Now you may awaken, and you must reply in the affirmative to the questions I shall ask you." Having given this last command rather quickly, but nevertheless very distinctly, he leant forward and blew lightly on her eyes. Whereupon she opened them slowly and smiled at him with a look of friendly recognition, as though she had not known who he was before. "You remember me, then, Marie?" he said, speaking in German once more.

"Yes," she answered, in a somewhat sleepy tone.

"And you trust me?"

"Yes," she answered again with a yawn, stretching her arms.

"You are willing that I should find some one to defend you?"

"Yes," she answered for the third time mechanically, without appearing to take any special interest in the matter. Then clasping her hands behind her head she leant back against the wall in an unconscious attitude of artistic repose and was very soon fast asleep.

"There," said Ahmed, pointing towards her, "I promised that you should have no more trouble with her."

"And upon my life," exclaimed Meissener, "I don't believe we shall! You have a wonderful power over the woman, and if you are as successful with all your other subjects, I envy you the possession of such a gift."

"It is nothing uncommon in my country," said the other modestly. "Many of the fakirs have it to a far

greater extent, being able to produce insensibility to pain; which is, of course, beyond my power."

"Hum," muttered the little doctor to himself, "I'm not so sure of that!" adding, in a tone of undisguised admiration, "I've met few men capable of exerting a stronger magnetic influence than you, my friend." Meissener thereupon, taking his arm, marched him out of the room and down the corridor to his own apartments. He insisted upon his remaining to the midday meal, and would take no refusal, although Ahmed protested that he had business in the town. "Whatever this precious business may be," said his host, "and I think I can guess what it is, no people here will see you till they have finished their dinner, so that there is plenty of time for you to have your own first."

Ahmed made no further objection, deciding that it might, after all, be the wisest course to take the little man into his confidence. Nor was any particular revelation necessary, since Meissener knew the main reason of his visit and alluded to it the moment they were seated at table. His colleague from Leipzig had put him under an obligation by calming the fury who had been placed in his care, and he was anxious to return this service if he could. Besides, he thought he saw his way to save himself still further trouble in the matter.

"You are going to look for some one to defend this lady?" he said, after seeing that his guest's wants were supplied. And when Ahmed had assented to this with a nod, he added, "Then you cannot do better than call upon the Rechtsanwalt Ehrlich at No. 7 Marktplatz. He is a friend of mine, and, like myself, a Jew. We

were students together at Berlin. I would give you a letter of introduction, but as you are going to him on a matter of business nothing of the kind will be necessary."

"I will call on your friend without delay," said Ahmed, glancing at his watch.

"There is no hurry," Meissener replied. "You will not find him at his office until half-past one. Ehrlich dines at the Black Eagle every day, and the *table d'hôte* is not over much before then. He is a clever fellow, and who knows that he won't get her off?"

"If he does," said Ahmed, quickly, guessing the other's unspoken thought, "you will be rid of her, after the trial. Are you prepared to give him any assistance?"

The prison doctor did not answer for a moment, then, with a slight hunching of his shoulders, and a marked raising of his moustache, he said, "I should certainly put no obstacles in his way, but I do not see how I am to help him."

"Suppose his defence was that the woman was mentally unsound?"

"My opinion on the point might not be asked."

"But if it were?"

"It would depend upon what I observed between this and the trial."

"You are not in a position to support that view *now*?"

"To be perfectly frank with you, no! But I am open to conviction, and shall not go out of my way to upset any evidence you are able to bring. However, I recommend you to have a talk with the Rechtsanwalt

first." With this piece of sound advice the little man bade an almost affectionate farewell to his guest, whose acquaintance he had only made that morning.

Ahmed's long legs carried him so fast down hill that he had groped his way through the arched entrance of No. 7 Marktplatz and up a broad flight of oak stairs before the lawyer had returned. He stood for some time gazing at the plate on the door, which informed possible clients that Adolph Ehrlich, Doctor utrisque juris, Rechtsanwalt, was to be consulted from 9 A.M to 12.30 P.M., and from 1.30 P.M. to 6. Uncertain whether to ring the bell or to go away for a little while, he was still hesitating when he heard a light quick footstep behind him, and, looking round, found himself face to face with a thin man of medium height, dressed in the conventional black of the learned professions. The lawyer at once ushered Ahmed into his study and, with an apology for having detained him, invited him to be seated. Then in an attitude of attention, with one of his knees crossed over the other and both his hands clasped about it, he silently listened to everything Ahmed had to say.

When the doctor had concluded, Herr Ehrlich did not speak immediately, but leaned back in his chair, screwed up his forehead into a net of wrinkles, took off his *pince-nez*, rubbed them on a coloured silk handkerchief, straightened out his thin legs to their full extent, and looked hard at his sharp-pointed in-turned toes as if seeking inspiration from some unexpected source. During this interval Ahmed, not wishing to disturb the lawyer's train of thought, remained perfectly still; and, after a little time, he pulled himself together, put on

his glasses again, and turned them towards his client. "My advice in this business is, for the present, to leave the question of responsibility on one side," he said. "We can secure that as a line of retreat, but should fight the main issue on broader grounds. Of course I know the details of the crime already; one cannot dine at the hotel, or drink a glass of beer in the Burg Keller, without hearing many times over everything there is to be told. And naturally my mind set itself to work to construct a scheme of defence, though there did not seem to be much chance of my services being retained. It appeared to me that the proper course would be to strike out boldly for justifiable homicide, or at least for circumstances of extreme provocation. Since we cannot hope to prove that Mnischko did not strangle this man, we must show that he acted under the influence of an incontrollable emotion."

"But we are not interested in the fellow," said Ahmed.

"There, I think, you are mistaken," continued the lawyer. "It is most important to lift the affair out of the category to which the prosecution will assert it belongs, into that of the *crime of passion*. As the story is being told in the streets, this is a murder that has been classed; every step of it is familiar. Your notion that we should defend the woman by suggesting that she was so entirely in this man's power as to have no will of her own is open to a very grave objection. Admit the theory of the prosecution, and it follows that the crime was not only premeditated, but planned with diabolical ingenuity. And the woman must then be convicted of at least an equal share of guilt with the man; unless you can produce evidence of her insanity

in the past, or a general consensus of medical opinion that she was insane at the time when the crime was committed. But I understand you cannot count upon doing that. On the other hand, if we represent Mariska as a vain, frivolous, light-headed, impressionable creature, to whom nothing was more natural than that she should fall in love with her Hamburg admirer, and Mnischko as being intensely passionate and jealous to the verge of madness, we may persuade the jury that he killed Herr Giesecke in a sudden access of rage at unexpectedly finding him in the company of his paramour. If we can obtain any sort of corroboration of this theory from the various witnesses who are bound to testify, we shall rob the crime of its preconcerted character, and it will not prevent us from calling you to prove that the woman is easily capable of being influenced. Moreover, it has the advantage of not placing the prosecution in possession of our ultimate ground of appeal against an adverse verdict. For if we were to put forward a direct plea of irresponsibility they would be sure to call rebutting evidence. Further, the feeling that he was saddled with the entire onus of the crime would be calculated to provoke a confession on the man's part. And though this would not, by itself, cause the conviction of our client, it could not fail to have a tremendously damaging effect."

"What do you propose, then?" said Ahmed.

"To defend both the prisoners on the lines I have indicated. It should not be difficult to secure the consent of Mnischko to my representing him; and I think I might undertake to arrange that myself. But it is another matter whether I ought to appear for them

in court. The case will come on at the next sitting of the Oberlandesgericht in Mittelburg, and if money were not a consideration ——"

"Pray spare no expense," said Ahmed, who, as he never spent anything on himself, had saved the major portion of the princely allowance he received from his father, and had even put by some of his earnings, so that he was, relatively speaking, a man of capital.

Ehrlich, who loved to conduct all his cases in the most economical manner consistent with a successful issue, and had not the smallest notion of overcharging any one however rich, replied, with a faint smile of amusement at the young stranger's eagerness, "The extra costs would not be very great, if I engaged a colleague from Berlin to plead our cause. I could do it myself; but I judge this to be an affair that should be handled by a specialist. For just as some of you doctors take up special departments of medicine, so certain jurists devote themselves to particular branches of law; and in criminal proceedings no one stands higher to-day than my friend Justizrat Simonsohn. He will give a new aspect to the case by his lucid exposition of our theory of defence, and get more out of the witnesses than I could hope to do. Also his mere appearance in court will impress the jury, and carry a certain amount of weight with the judges."

"If you can secure his services, let him name any fee he likes," said Ahmed, delighted with the lawyer's description of this brilliant advocate.

"Oh! the fee is not so exorbitant," Ehrlich answered, raising his hand as though to reprove the doctor's reck-

lessness. "A thousand marks and his travelling expenses, say twelve hundred in all."

"Very moderate, indeed!" replied the young man.

"Then the only remaining question is, Will he come?"

"Is there any doubt?"

"Every doubt."

"But surely *you* can persuade him."

"Well," said the lawyer, smiling, "I think I might. Every one says that the Mariska is an exceedingly beautiful woman; and Simonsohn, like all great men, has a weakness for beautiful women. On that account he is always ready to defend one in the courts. Besides, he knows they attract attention; and that is what a popular advocate wants. No fee would induce Simonsohn to come all the way from Berlin, unless he thought this trial would be talked about. But I fancy I can satisfy him on that point. For the rest, you may safely leave the matter in my hands, Dr. Ahmed." Then rising and glancing at the card he had placed on the desk beside him, he added: "I have your address, I see." There being nothing more to ask, he bowed the doctor out of his book-lined study, conducting him through a hall into which the books had overflowed, and taking leave of him ceremoniously at the door.

Ahmed returned to Leipzig with a far lighter heart than that with which he had left it in the morning. He felt that his time had not been wasted, and that he had found a good friend in Meissener, and a trustworthy ally in Ehrlich. Elsa could see that he was greatly pleased with the result of his day's work, when he told her that he had visited the prison and consulted a lawyer. She was glad, too, because during the last

two days there had been an uncomfortable state of tension between them, which might, at any moment, have broken out into mutual recriminations. But now that Ahmed's mind had been to a certain degree set at rest, this danger had passed. Elsa was relieved also to find that he had apparently dismissed Mariska entirely from his thoughts. So they drifted along once more in perfect harmony for several weeks, until one evening a bulky letter came in a large oblong sealed envelope for Ahmed. It caught Elsa's eye directly she saw it, lying on the hall table with a sedate air of official importance. And when the doctor returned a little later, he was by no means surprised to find it there, for he guessed that it could only be a formal summons to attend the trial. He knew that the hearing was fixed for the next week, as he had been in constant correspondence with Herr Ehrlich, whom he had supplied with all the necessary funds, and who had made every preparation for the defence. But the young man had not broached the subject of his giving evidence to Elsa, as he feared that it would again arouse her jealousy. Perhaps he might have even invented some imaginary patient to whom he had been sent by Professor Weigand, if she had not seen this tell-tale letter, about which she was sure to question him. He could scarcely explain it away by saying that some one connected with the High Court of Mittelburg had been taken ill. Besides, she must know all about it in a few days when the account of the trial was published; so that it might be better to tell her the truth at once. He therefore said, in a casual tone, as he entered the room, "I have just received this letter, Elsa."

"Yes," she answered; "I noticed it as I came in. It looked so imposing."

"It is from the Court of Justice at Mittelburg, calling upon me to give evidence."

"Oh!" said Elsa, with a sigh of relief, "I thought that envelope might contain your appointment to a professorship somewhere, and I was selfish enough to feel sorry."

"Because of my promotion?"

"No; because it might take you to some place a long way off, and then, perhaps, I should never see you again."

"Elsa," the young man said solemnly, "is there any place so far off that you could not join me there?"

"Not if you would let me," replied the nurse, her voice broken with emotion. "I will follow you to the end of the earth, Ahmed, if need be, and you do not thrust me from you." She threw her arms round his neck as she said this, and clung to him, as though she dreaded that he might be taken from her at that moment. Possibly the impulse sprang, too, from some subconscious interpretation of his thoughts which warned her that they were occupied by another. However this may have been, the instinctive demonstration of her love was not without its effect on Ahmed. Holding her to him with one arm, he pushed back the heavy red mass of hair from her forehead, and, gazing into her upturned eyes, said, in a low earnest voice, "We have gone too far hand in hand ever to turn back, Elsa, and while I live, I hope always to have you by my side, for if you left me, I should be altogether alone."

"I too have no one else to care for me now," said the nurse a little regretfully; "but I do not mind that, Ahmed, so long as I am sure of you."

"Look into my eyes," he said, with a fond smile, "and see a picture which should make you quite sure. You can have very little faith in yourself if you doubt me," he added lightly, after a moment's pause, during which she gazed at the twin reflections of herself. "And you pay yourself an ill compliment when you are jealous of any other woman — Marie, for instance!"

"Oh, but I'm not in the least," replied Elsa.

"Ah! I'm glad to hear you say that," said Ahmed, quickly, "because the trial I have to attend on Monday is hers."

"You are going to give evidence?"

"Yes."

"As to what?"

"Her mental condition."

"You won't say anything about having known her at that tingel-tangel?"

"Not unless they ask me."

"But they will ask you, of course."

"Well, what then?"

"Your colleagues here will be offended."

"Why?"

"Because they do not consider it fitting that a doctor should visit such places."

"I don't think Professor Weigand would care; and for the others, I am not dependent on their goodwill. So that you need scarcely object, Elsa."

"It is for your own sake, Ahmed."

"I must obey my conscience, no matter what hap-

pens," said he firmly. Elsa saw then that she could not dissuade him, and changed her tone to one of agreement.

"I am content that you should do what you think right, Ahmed," she said, "and I only trust you may be able to help this poor creature."

"Thank you for those words, dear," he said; "they have made my mind easier than it has been for some time past."

And Elsa knew from the look of love in his eyes, and the tender note in his voice, that she had won a great victory by her submissiveness that night.

VII

AHMED was grateful to Elsa for not having seriously opposed his decision; but he did not think it prudent to inform her that he had paid a second visit to Zwirnau. This had been the result of a clever manœuvre on the part of his astute lawyer. Herr Ehrlich had come to the conclusion that although the interest the young doctor had displayed in the female prisoner was convincing evidence of a soft heart, it lacked the impartiality that carries weight with a hard-headed jury. He had, therefore, approached his ex-fellow-student, Meissener, in the Burg Keller one evening, on the subject of an official examination of the woman. And having that very day heard from Ahmed that the Professor was overwhelmed with work, he suggested that Weigand should be asked to see Marie Schüler.

Whether the prison doctor saw through the Rechtsanwalt's ruse or not, is uncertain, as he gave no audible expression to his thoughts at the time. But after drinking a whole glass of Erlanger to his friend's special health, he promised to put the matter before Freiherr von Baltzan, who, he declared, had taken a fancy to the creature himself. In saying this Meissener was probably not without warrant, since the Governor at once agreed to do what was proposed, and even offered to pay Dr. Weigand's fee, though not

ill-pleased to hear that it had been already provided for. As a matter of fact, no one was ever called upon to pay it, for the Professor, being unable to come when von Baltzan wrote to him, sent Dr. Ahmed in his place. It was naturally beneath the dignity of the Governor to receive an assistant, so he had allowed Meissener to do the honours, and had thus given Ahmed another chance of talking confidentially to his colleague. The little man had welcomed him effusively, and assured him that he would find the prisoner quite changed.

"Since you saw her," he said, "she has become as quiet as a lamb; she hardly speaks at all, except in answer to a direct question, and then only in a monosyllable." This improvement he ascribed entirely to the wonderful influence that Ahmed had exerted; and he was profuse in his thanks to him for having brought it about.

The young man smiled at the extravagance of the prison doctor's gratitude, but nevertheless hastened to take advantage of it, by pointing out the advisability of saying nothing about his previous visit.

Meissener agreed that it would certainly serve no purpose to speak of that first visit now, and went on to say that, as the thing had been irregular, he had mentioned it to no one, not even to the Governor.

"Let it remain between us, then," said Ahmed, "a professional secret?"

When Meissener had signified his assent with a nod, Ahmed reflected that only two other people, Elsa and Ehrlich, knew of his having been in Zwirnau before. The Rechtsanwalt would assuredly never betray the

fact, and Fräulein Hartvig would not know that he had gone there again.

This was the sole visit to which he should allude; and he might safely pose at the trial as an independent medical authority who had been asked to see the prisoner by her official attendant. He could allow it to appear that he had then recognised her as the dancing girl he had previously known at Leipzig. Before going up to the infirmary he had been careful to ascertain whether the same woman was looking after Marie.

"No," Meissener had replied. "She is alone now; we did not consider it necessary to have her watched after she left off raving. She ought to have been put in one of the cells, but the Governor thought it would be best to let her remain where she was."

When they entered the room Marie was sitting by the stove, reading a book which the susceptible von Baltzan had lent her; but she looked up from it on Meissener's calling her by name, and immediately recognised his companion.

"Ah, doctor!" she exclaimed, speaking in Little Russian, "you have come back at last! Oh, I have been waiting for you, waiting, waiting." She let the book slip from her fingers, and came quickly towards Ahmed. Then, falling upon her knees before him, she clasped his hand and pressed it to her lips in an agony of self-abandonment.

Meissener, who judged this to be no part of the official consultation, turned away from them to gaze out of the high barred window, as though he had suddenly observed something extraordinary in the aspect of the sky.

"Save me!" the woman cried, in a tone of intense emotion, clinging to him and looking up into his face with an expression of passionate entreaty.

"That is what I am trying to do, Mariska," Ahmed answered in the same dialect, passing his disengaged hand slowly downwards over her yellow hair; then, gently releasing his other hand, he made a similar movement with it on the opposite side. In a few moments her agitation became less violent, and she allowed him to lift her from the ground. And when the prison doctor turned towards them he found that Marie was seated calmly in her chair again.

Ahmed then proceeded to examine the woman in a thoroughly professional manner, calling Meissener's attention to certain symptoms. Meanwhile she remained quite passive, neither saying anything herself, nor seeming to take any notice of what was said by the doctors. When Ahmed had finished he promised to send his colleague a written report on the prisoner for official reference, which, he begged, should be regarded as confidential and not on any account produced, unless it were called for after his evidence at the trial.

In this also Dr. Meissener cheerfully acquiesced, provided that he was not asked personally to support a plea of irresponsibility; as in that case it would be his duty to communicate the document to the prosecution beforehand.

"No such plea will be raised in the first instance," replied Ahmed.

"Ah, so I understand from Ehrlich — a clever head, my friend; but I am glad he has left me out of his plan,"

said the little man, with a grimace of mingled admiration and dread.

Marie evidently heard them talking, but their words conveyed no meaning to her. When, however, Ahmed had passed his hands slowly upwards in front of her face, she once more assumed an air of comprehension, and into her great blue eyes, which had all the while been fixed upon him, there came an expression of infinite confidence. Quick to note this look and to perceive that it indicated a frame of mind in which implicit obedience would be paid to his commands, he returned her steady stare, and again addressed her in her mother tongue.

"Mariska, you have entrusted your defence to me and I shall not fail you. I have found an advocate who will plead for your life as though you were his own child. But whatever may be said, you must make no sign that you hear. You must sit there before your judges as at the trial of some one else, some one who is nothing to you. Remember that! You understand me?"

"Yes," she answered in a low voice. "I understand, my brother, and I will remember." Her mouth was slowly drawn down on one side into a curious smile. An expression that Ahmed knew well; one that denoted subjection to the will of another, together with the existence of some secret understanding. And he hoped that Meissener had never perceived this look of cunning in the woman's face, as it always caused him to shudder when he saw it there himself.

Before saying good-bye to the prison doctor, Ahmed apologised to him for having, when on an official visit,

spoken to Marie in a language with which his colleague might not be acquainted. He further declared that he had only done so because the woman was much more familiar with Ruthenian than with either high or low German. But the little man, who, in spite of his brutal directness in matters that another would consider private, had none of the vulgar curiosity that more tactful people often display, was loud in his assurances that his visitor might have talked to the girl in Chinese, if he had chosen, without giving him the least offence. The two doctors, therefore, shook hands warmly on parting, and remained the best of friends.

They did not meet again until that bleak December day on which the sitting of the Oberlandesgericht opened at Mittelburg; when they ran across one another by accident in the great hall of the Palace of Justice. Ahmed was glad to hear from Meissener, who had come over early that morning from Zwirnau with the prisoners, that Marie's health had not suffered. And when he saw her in court later on, she certainly appeared little the worse for her long imprisonment. In this respect she presented a striking contrast to Mnischko, on whom all these weeks of being shut up within four walls had obviously told. The man's gaunt face had become ashen grey, his haggard eyes wandered restlessly about the court, and his bony fingers moved nervously along the brass rail before him, as though he were picking out a tune on some invisible instrument. Meanwhile the woman looked straight before her, not seeming to take any notice of her surroundings, but with a resigned pathetic ex-

pression in her eyes and the pose of her body, which gave her an aspect of martyrdom.

Soon, however, the attention of everybody was directed to the selection of the jury. And Ahmed, who had never seen a trial of any kind before, watched the proceedings with breathless interest. As the names were drawn one by one and called out, a pause was made to enable each side to exercise their privilege of challenge. Only twice before the number was complete did the representative of the prosecution, Staatsanwalt Nelke, pronounce the word "refused"; while, for the prisoners, Ehrlich made but one objection. This was to the name of a certain ship-captain; and why he should not desire to have so superior a man on the jury, Ahmed was at a loss to understand.

Now that the Court was at length constituted the minds of all present turned to the issue before it, and to the contending lawyers who were to fight out this matter to the death. The good people of Mittelburg were not often given an opportunity of witnessing such a contest, and though they took a pardonable pride in their official gladiator they rejoiced in the fact that he would that day meet a redoubtable antagonist. For they by no means desired that he should have a walk-over, nor did they consider it probable against the celebrated advocate, who had come all the way from Berlin, and whom they were so anxious to hear. But gradually, as the evidence against the prisoners was unfolded, any chance of an acquittal seemed to recede farther and farther as each fresh person was called. Sometimes, when the prosecuting counsel had brought his examination to an end, Simonsohn would rise to his

feet and put a few short questions to the witnesses; but oftener he would allow them to leave the stand unquestioned. So that in spite of his massive head, thin intellectual features, and crisp, curly, black beard deep-rooted in his big, bare throat, the spectators began to lose faith in him. But behind that impenetrable mask a subtle mind was busy, working faster even than the pen which ran so rapidly over the paper before him, and from time to time, after making a verbatim note of any important point in the evidence, he exchanged a significant glance with Herr Ehrlich, who sat by his side.

When the long list of witnesses for the prosecution had been gone through the judges decided to adjourn the Court at that point. During the interval Ahmed was introduced to Simonsohn, and before they had talked together for many minutes he discovered what a grasp this extraordinary man had on the facts. He somewhat surprised the doctor by saying that he only wanted him to prove that Marie had always been volatile and shallow-minded. But Ahmed was still more surprised when he said that he did not intend to call many other witnesses.

On the Court being reassembled, Ehrlich immediately opened the case for the defence, and the first witness called was the proprietor of the concert-hall at Dresden where the prisoners had appeared; a jovial little fellow, with an air of not knowing why on earth he had been asked to give evidence. To be sure he had known the accused; both of them, for some time; and Mnischko, he might say, well. But as to the Mariska, he could only say, that, for his part, he had

found none like her, none at once so popular and so proper in her conduct. Did her partner Mnischko appear to object to the marked attentions Herr Giesecke paid her? Yes; the witness thought he did. Why? Because he was sullen and ill-tempered during Herr Giesecke's visits to the hall. Was that an unusual thing with the musician? Very unusual; he had at other times always found him a charming companion. When Ehrlich had finished his examination the prosecuting counsel stood up and asked the concert-hall proprietor if it were true that the police kept an eye on his establishment. "Possibly," he answered; "they come there often enough, and they never seem in a great hurry to go."

"You mean that the police authorities stay to see if they approve of your performances?" asked the counsel.

"No," said the witness, with a broad grin. "To see if they approve of my wine, and they can't do that until they've drunk a bottle apiece." This reply provoked a certain amount of suppressed merriment, and under cover of the titter which ran through the court Herr Nelke dropped back into his seat, after making a dignified gesture of protest. Several other witnesses followed, who testified to their knowledge of the prisoners at various times, and who were questioned as to their own status by the prosecution; but nothing of any great moment was elicited from them by either side. When, however, Dr. Ahmed came forward to take his place at the witness-stand, the people who had ceased to listen to what was being said, and had begun to whisper to one another, immediately became silent.

His appearance alone created a feeling of interest which his foreign name helped to increase.

Ehrlich laid considerably more stress on Ahmed's princely birth than was agreeable to the young man. But as this fact evidently impressed the jury more than his numerous medical titles and distinctions, he submitted to the lawyer's questions about his father with a good grace. Having got what he wanted, Ehrlich left the witness to tell the Court what he knew of the female prisoner in his own words. And after hesitating for a few seconds, as though to consider where he should start, Ahmed began to give his evidence exactly at the point selected by his astute legal adviser.

He told the Court how he was sent by his chief to see a woman in the castle at Zwirnau, whose health had caused the prison doctor some anxiety. How he found that she was a dancer whom he had previously known at Leipzig, and in whom he had taken an interest. He went on to explain that this was of a scientific rather than a personal kind; and that, though his attention had been attracted to Marie Schüler in the first place by her beauty, it had been further engaged by her mental qualities. Not that these were of a high order, on the contrary, they were in all probability below the average even among the uneducated members of her class. He would describe her as undeveloped, a grown-up child incapable of sustained thought or consecutive action; and what he had noticed in her when at liberty had been confirmed by what he had observed during a prolonged examination of her in the prison. The woman was, in his opinion, deficient in will-power, and over-sensitive to outside suggestions. She would,

therefore, be unable to offer a serious resistance to the repeated entreaties of another to perform any act, no matter how much opposed to her own inclination. He then concluded by reciting the clinical symptoms which Marie exhibited that tended to support this view. And never once had she looked at him while the Court hung breathless on his words; but as he turned to go she followed him mechanically with her eyes. He was not yet, however, allowed to leave the witness-stand, for the prosecuting counsel motioned to him to remain; and asked him, in an almost deferential tone, if he suggested that the female prisoner had acted under some occult influence. To this question Ahmed replied that it was not his province to suggest what might have happened.

"But do you think it possible?" said Nelke.

"That depends upon how you define the word 'occult,'" Ahmed answered.

"I will put it to you in another way, then, doctor," said the Staatsanwalt, with unruffled urbanity of manner. "Do you believe that the woman committed this crime in the hypnotic state?"

"No," replied the young man quickly. "I do not believe her capable of committing such a crime in any condition whatsoever."

If Staatsanwalt Nelke had hoped to obtain some damaging admission from the witness, or to involve him in a contradiction, he had only succeeded in giving him an opportunity to state his personal conviction in Marie's innocence. And seeing that he was not likely by further questions to shake Ahmed's evidence, he resolved to deal with it later on; he no doubt remem-

bered that it is always much easier for counsel to make an expert appear foolish in a speech than in the witness-stand.

The evidence on both sides being now complete, the president read out the questions, that, after consultation with his fellow-judges, and lengthy and conflicting objections on the part of Simonsohn and Nelke, he had decided to put to the jury. These had the advantage of being exceedingly simple, and ran thus: —

"Is the accused Mnischko Lajös proved to have been guilty of intentionally and deliberately killing Joseph Giesecke?"

If this should be answered in the negative, "Is he proved guilty of intentionally killing Joseph Giesecke, but without deliberation?" And if not, "Is he proved guilty of killing Joseph Giesecke, on the spot, being enraged at an unprovoked insult offered to him by the deceased?"

The first two questions were substantially repeated when the charge of abetting Mnischko was framed against Marie Schüler; but the third question in her case took an entirely different shape, and one that had been most strongly objected to by the prosecution. It left the jury to say whether the accused at the time of the perpetration of the deed was in a state of unconsciousness or mental disturbance, that prevented the exercise of her free will; or whether she was compelled to assist in it, either through irresistible force or through a threat, associated with an immediate and unavoidable danger to her life.

The amended questions having been again read out, Staatsanwalt Nelke began his exposition of the case

for the prosecution. With relentless logic he built up the evidences of the crime piece by piece, until every statement had been fitted into its place. All this he did without any appearance of effort, as if it were a thing no one, who had the facts before him, could have failed to do. And Ahmed wondered how any man could go so coolly to work to deprive another of life. For what else was the elderly, grey-whiskered advocate doing with his glib, suave speech and expressive, though subdued, gestures? It was not his function, he had said, to implore the jury to convict the prisoners; nevertheless he was trying hard to make it impossible for them to do otherwise.

Ahmed, who had sat straining forward to catch each word all this time, underwent what was positive physical torture while Herr Nelke proceeded to comment upon the fact that the trunk could be securely fastened without the aid of a rope. For what purpose, then, asked the prosecuting counsel, pointing to the coil on the table, had Mnischko provided himself with the stout cord that was lying there? When, however, after having brought every detail of the murder into high relief, he turned his attention to the doctor's own evidence, Ahmed leaned back in his seat, with a smile of profound indifference. What was the meaning of this testimony produced at the eleventh hour, asked Herr Nelke, if it did not amount to a plea of irresponsibility on the part of the female prisoner? But if the defence desired to put forward such a plea, why had they not called upon the doctor officially attached to the Court to examine this woman? And even supposing the Leipzig surgeon to be right in his opinion, he

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had only told the jury that the woman was susceptible of being influenced.

"Well," he continued, "we are all more or less capable of being influenced by others, according to our individual tendency towards good or evil; but this does not render us unaccountable for our actions. We have to pay the penalty for the evil we do, just as we are permitted to take the credit for the good. Moreover, there is another side to this contention. What if the woman influenced the man? It does not seem impossible. In Dresden we hear that he was angry because of the deceased's attentions to his paramour, while in Zwirnau he appears to have regarded them without noticeable disfavour. What had brought about this change in his attitude towards the Hamburg merchant? Had the woman in the meantime persuaded him to kill and rob her admirer?"

This attack direct on Marie Schüler caused all the greater sensation on account of its unexpectedness, and it was made the more emphatic by the abrupt manner in which Herr Nelke resumed his seat. He had spoken so calmly and dispassionately that the horrible character of his final innuendo did not become at once apparent. Then, as through a collective instinct, all eyes were concentrated on Marie to see if her face betrayed any sign of emotion. None was visible, however, unless it were an almost imperceptible droop at the corner of the mouth, that no one except Ahmed observed. And he only saw it, because he knew the muscle which pulled the lip down into that servile smile, having often wished that he could insert a long circular knife, with a curved cutting edge at its ex-

tremity, under the skin so as to divide the controlling nerve. Still, if her expression had remained unaltered, a marked change had come over Mnischko's pallid face; for the sudden rush of blood to his head had turned it from a greenish grey to a leaden blue. This congestion gave him the staring look of surprise that is seen sometimes in the bloated features of a man who has been drowned, and Ahmed felt that the jury must recognise it as the aspect of one who has ceased to hope.

But, like everybody else in court, the members of the jury, having glanced involuntarily at the female prisoner, next turned their attention to her advocate. Slowly, after a pause long enough to allow the buzz of conversation which had followed the end of Herr Nelke's speech to subside, Justizrat Simonsohn rose. Speaking in the same placid measured tones which the prosecuting counsel had adopted, he began by complimenting his colleague on the able way in which he had reconstructed the crime. "The Staatsanwalt," he said, "has, with infinite care, painted a picture in lurid colours of everything that took place in the house in the Wallgasse on the fatal night. He is to be congratulated on the judicious use he has made of the heterogeneous mass of circumstantial evidence that was placed, a little too freely perhaps, at his disposal by the police."

He then examined the evidence for the prosecution in detail, and tried to show that nothing was proved except that Joseph Giesecke met his death at the hands of the male prisoner. He did not seek to deny that such was the fact. And the accused, Mnischko, would

confess to having killed the Hamburger; but the circumstances that led up to the act, he would show, were entirely different to those the prosecuting counsel had depicted. From the beginning Marie had repulsed the advances of Giesecke, as much as was possible for one who must be polite to every visitor to the place in which she worked for her living. On the evening when he had driven with her to the corner of the Wallgasse she had indignantly refused to allow him to accompany her home. But after she thought she had succeeded in sending him away he had returned, as the jury had heard the drosky-driver describe, and forced himself into the house. "Conceive the position of this woman — knowing that her lover, who was furiously jealous of the man, must come back to find him there before long. Doubtless she implored him to be gone, warning him of the danger if he remained, while he probably disregarded her entreaties, in the idea that he had at worst to deal with a blackmailer."

"If I possessed the art of the Staatsanwalt," he continued, "I might draw a graphic picture of what followed when the accused entered that room. But I prefer to leave the actual details to your imagination. Giesecke may well have offered Mnischko money to be rid of him, and thus directly provoked the assault that proved fatal. The prosecution have sought to make a great deal out of the rope, but in a struggle to the death any weapon that comes to hand is grasped. And nothing would be more natural than that this piece of rope should have been lying within reach of Mnischko, or that he should have twisted it about his antagonist's throat if he got the chance. Who could say exactly

what happened at such a time? Could the accused himself tell them in what order his actions followed one another? All he would know for certain was that at last the moment came when he realised that he had killed this man, and that his next impulse had been to remove the traces of his criminal act. Of course, he should not have yielded to that impulse. But were they to expect in an ignorant stroller the same high standard of duty which governs the conduct of educated citizens? And, above all, should we expect the woman, who felt herself the unwilling cause of a deed which she had been powerless to prevent, to betray the man she regarded as her husband? Emphatically no! It would have been easy for Marie Schüler to clear herself of all complicity in this crime had she chosen to denounce Mnischko at the first opportunity. But she did not choose to secure her safety at the expense of another; and what has been her reward? Without the authority of the man by whose side she is now standing, that basest of all excuses in the world's history had been made for him — 'the woman tempted me!'"

Little by little the Justizrat had thrown off his calm judicial manner, and he closed with a passionate appeal to the jury, urging them, if in any doubt, to err on the side of mercy. "It has been sought," he said in conclusion, with a wide sweep of the left hand towards Herr Nelke, "to represent this woman as capable of every infamy. Why? Merely in order to harmonise her character with the fantastic theory of the prosecution, without a scrap of evidence, and in the face of trustworthy testimony to the contrary.

The jury have been invited to disregard the evidenc of Dr. Ahmed; but the opinion of an expert in psychology is at least as valuable as that of a street-porter or a housemaid or any other of the intelligent witnesses called on the other side. And he has certainly proved that the female prisoner is a light-headed, frivolous, easily influenced creature, in no way resembling the cold, calculating, purposeful Lucretia Borgia indicated by the prosecution. I invite you to accept the simplest solution of the known data, one that must occur to any man who looks at them with an open mind; and if you will shut out of your deliberations everything which is not supported by evidence, I am perfectly willing that you should dismiss all I have said from your minds."

After his advocate's brilliant speech the few halting sentences Mnischko uttered in his own defence proved a painful anticlimax, yet, though his words were not fluent, he spoke fervently, as a man must who is pleading for his life. He described how he had not intended to return home at all that night when Herr Giesecke died. He had quarrelled with Marie in the morning, and had bought the big American trunk so that she might pack her things separately from his. For he had meant to leave her, before she threw him over finally for the Hamburger. That was why he had not gone back to the house with her as usual, but had sat talking to the proprietor of the concert-room instead. Then, after a time, the feeling had come over him that he must see her once more before they parted, and he had returned to their lodgings. There he had discovered the stranger embracing Marie, who struggled

to get free. From that moment he had no longer been master of his actions. He could only say that the man had offered him money, and that he had killed him; had strangled him with his hands at first, and then with the rope, which he had picked up in his teeth.

There was something at once horrible and convincing in this last detail, which caused every one to gaze at Mnischko's square jaw and solid yellow teeth, as though fascinated by their ugliness, and so they hardly heard when his companion, speaking in a low level tone, said, "I am innocent." Nor was this strange, for she put no expression into the words, but repeated them mechanically at the prompting of Ehrlich.

Soon, however, all eyes were fastened on the president, who addressed himself to the task of enlightening the jury upon the difference between manslaughter and murder. He treated rather of such cases in general than of the particular issue they were called upon to try; and, without expressing any opinion as to the validity of the evidence, left them to answer "yes" or "no" to the questions he then signed and handed to them. On the retirement of the jury the prisoners were also led away. It was already dark outside, and the electric light had been turned on for some time; and every minute the suspense became more unbearable to Ahmed. He wondered how the people who still crowded the court could sit there chatting to each other upon indifferent matters, utterly forgetful of those two lives which hung in the balance. After a weary half-hour of waiting, which seemed an eternity to him, an official entered from the direction of the jury-room, and he thought that the jury were returning at last.

But he was quickly undeceived, for the man had only come to fetch something from among the exhibits. When Simonsohn saw that this was the coil of rope, he glanced at Ehrlich and shook his head.

It was not till a full hour later, during which Ahmed had in despair lost all count of time, and had sunk into a state of lethargy, that the twelve men solemnly filed back into court. In a second there was a dead silence, and every one listened intently for the words that were about to fall from the foreman. He spoke firmly, in a clear, well-modulated voice, saying, "On my honour and conscience, I declare the verdict of the jury to be, to the question: 'Is the accused, Mnischko Lajös, proved to have been guilty of intentionally and deliberately killing Joseph Giesecke?' — Yes, by more than seven votes! To the question: 'Is the accused, Marie Schüler, proved to have been guilty of intentionally and deliberately abetting the accused, Mnischko Lajös, in killing Joseph Giesecke?' — Yes, by more than seven votes."

From that moment everything passed before Ahmed's eyes as though in a dream. His most distinct memory was of the manner in which Mnischko collapsed into an inanimate bundle when he heard the verdict, and of how, when her turn came, Marie laughed in a strange, hollow, mirthless way. But of Simonsohn's contentions on their behalf he could remember nothing, save that the word "environment" occurred somewhere in them. And he could not recall that either of the condemned exhibited any peculiar emotion when their sentence was finally pronounced. Mnischko had realised what his fate must be, as soon as he had heard

the answer of the jury, and, from that moment, had looked like a dead man; but Ahmed hoped that Marie had remained insensible to what was happening all through the trial. The two were led out again as the Court rose, and Ahmed was glad that the woman did not turn her eyes towards him, for he had dreaded to see in them a look of bitter reproach. He knew that she would be unreasonable if she blamed him, yet he found some difficulty himself in muttering a few words of thanks to Simonsohn when the Justizrat came over to say good-bye to him.

"Our one chance was that they would not inspect the rope," said the great advocate. "That is why we objected to the ship-captain being on the jury. It contains a knot that could only have come there by design!"

"Well," he added, with a gesture which was intended to console, "you still have your plea of irresponsibility. I scarcely touched that myself, because I hoped to do better for you. It means life-long imprisonment, you see."

He then politely took leave of Ahmed, who allowed himself to be conducted to the station by Meissener and Ehrlich. The lawyer made every effort to reassure him by explaining that he intended to present a memorial on Marie Schüler's behalf to the Minister of Justice; and the good-natured little doctor promised that he would do all in his power for her while she was under his charge. But Ahmed, though grateful to them both, was so disheartened that he could only grasp their hands in silence. And when he crept up to his third floor in the Brüderstrasse a little after midnight, he

hardly had strength enough even to climb the stairs one at a time, so completely had his moral defeat been transmuted into physical fatigue.

Once in his own room, he sank down on the sofa by the stove, too tired to sleep. But soon a cold object inserted itself into the hand that hung listlessly by his side, and he was aware that Fritz had scrambled out of his comfortable basket in order to bring him a mute token of sympathy. "Ah, Fritzchen," he said sadly, stroking the dog's long head, "I saved you, but I cannot save your mistress. She will have to die." A choking sound rose in his throat that compelled him to rub the back of his hand across his eyes. Then some one stole softly into the room and sat beside him. It was Elsa, who had kept the fire burning and who had waited up for him, thinking that perhaps he might return. By some subtle instinct she knew that the worst had come to pass; she knew, also, that no words of hers could comfort him. Therefore she leant her head against his shoulder and said nothing. She guessed, moreover, that his thoughts that night were with the woman in the prison at Zwirnau.

VIII

OFTEN during his long night vigil at the palace of Wilhelmsbrunn Ahmed found it difficult to believe that his patient was not the unhappy creature whose acquittal he had tried in vain to secure, but whom he still hoped to save from paying the death penalty. Their features were indeed curiously similar, both in colouring and expression, however different these two women might be in disposition. The likeness of Countess Lichtenthal to Mariska had not only startled Ahmed out of his self-composure when he first recognised it, but had brought the dancing girl so vividly before his eyes that he felt almost as though he were again going through the ordeal of the past three months. Towards daybreak he contrived to shake off these morbid fancies. He had his duty as a doctor to think of, and of one thing, at any rate, he meant to make sure. This other young life should not slip through his fingers. Such was the dominant thought in Ahmed's mind when he went to the private apartments of the Grand Duke that morning. It being St. Stephen's day, his Royal Highness had attended early mass; but as he was still unable to take any part in the Christmas festivities, which he had ordered should be held as usual, he had since busied himself with the transaction of those minor affairs of state that occupy so much of a reigning prince's time.

The young man consequently found him seated at a large table in the library with a pile of papers before him. After telling him that the Countess had made such satisfactory progress that she would be permitted to see him later in the day, he carefully examined the Grand Duke's right arm and renewed the dressing on the hand which had been so badly scorched. At the same time, he warned him not to attempt to use this hand for some days. He was just about to retire, when his august patient, who had hitherto scarcely spoken half-a-dozen words, suddenly asked him a question which brought him to a standstill at the door.

"Is my wife in any immediate need of your services, Dr. Ahmed?"

"No. We shall disturb Countess Lichtenthal as little as possible during the next few hours. I am hoping that she will fall into a natural sleep."

"Good! Then please take a seat; I have something of importance to ask you," said the Grand Duke, pointing to a chair on the opposite side of the table.

Ahmed returned immediately and took the chair indicated, with a feeling of uneasiness as to what his Royal Highness was about to say. He could imagine this to be nothing except the outcome of his having been denounced by von Engelbrecht, through one of the Court officials. But he soon saw that he had wronged the Hofrat, who had evidently kept his word not to make any formal protest, in spite of his having metaphorically washed his hands of the case on the previous evening.

"You are interested in the fate of the woman named

Schüler, I gather?" said the Grand Duke, drawing an open portfolio towards him with his uninjured hand.

"Yes," replied Ahmed, whose breath had been almost taken away by the unexpected nature of the question.

"I have been reading a report of her trial and I came across your name. It struck me that I had met it before, and I then remembered to have heard Professor Weigand ask if Dr. Ahmed had arrived. You are described here as Ahmed Khan, a native of northern India. I see also that your father is a tributary of the Ameer of Afghanistan. You are, therefore, the son of a prince!"

"But not the son of his favourite wife, sir."

"Ah, I understand! Still you are of royal birth, and that should create a natural bond of sympathy between us. You will, then, not take it amiss if I am perfectly open with you?"

The young man bowed in token of assent, and, after a slight pause, the Grand Duke continued.

"Your evidence has interested me in the woman, but it has failed to convince me that she is not legally responsible."

"It failed to convince her judges," said Ahmed, with a suspicion of rancour in his tone.

"That would not weigh with me if I were sure that your opinion was right. Come now, Dr. Ahmed, tell me exactly what you know about her. There are details perhaps which you could not speak of in court."

"I told the Court everything of importance."

"As to your conclusions, but I would like to hear some of the steps that brought you to them. For instance, what first made you believe the woman mad?"

"I don't go so far as to say that she is mad in the ordinary sense of the word. What I do say is, that she acted under the influence of another, the man Mnischko, supposing that she had a share in the crime at all. I hold that this woman is incapable of exercising the least mental force; and, therefore, that she could not follow out a deliberate scheme of any kind, unless her actions were controlled by some one who possessed considerable will-power."

"Ah," said the Grand Duke, "if that were so, my course would be clear enough; but how do you *know* it to be the case?"

"I have experimented upon her by means of suggestion myself."

"Since the murder?"

"No; before it, when she was performing with Mnischko at a miserable little concert-hall in Leipzig."

"How long ago?"

"Over a year! For a time I succeeded in completely destroying the obvious influence this fellow exerted upon her."

"How?"

"Merely by mental suggestion. As long as that was maintained Mnischko had no hold over the woman whatever. But one night my thoughts were diverted from her by an accident to a poor little dog. I then saw how quickly the man's influence could reassert itself. He had been following us, in an aimless way, and the moment my back was turned on Mariska she summoned him to her side."

"Well?" inquired the Grand Duke, with a flicker of amusement in his tired eyes.

"I did not see the woman again until the day I visited her in the prison at Zwirnau."

"Where you were sent by Dr. Weigand?"

"Yes," replied the young man, after a moment's hesitation.

"And at the trial you testified in the woman's favour," said the Grand Duke, with an expression of deep thought in his knitted brows and firmly closed lips. "You were more charitable than most people, Dr. Ahmed. But, tell me, how do you account for her sudden revulsion of feeling towards this man?"

"Simply enough; her emotions have no depth; they are the mere reflections of something which takes place outside her, and always tend to follow the line of least resistance. She showed this in her behaviour about the dog; she was fond of it, up to the point when she fancied it had become a source of danger, then fear quickly got the better of her affection, and she wanted me to leave it to die. So too with me; as long as I devoted myself to her I was the only person she cared for in the world. Yet directly she felt that my thoughts were occupied with something else, and that for the moment she stood alone, her mind reverted to the old bondage, and she once more surrendered to the influence of a man who ill-treated her, but whose slave she was ready to become again, because he filled her life."

"Well," said the Grand Duke, gravely, "I am glad to have heard this from your own lips, my friend. But to decide in such a case is a heavy responsibility, the heaviest that can ever be laid on the conscience of one man. Heaven knows that I would rather shirk it,

that I am very reluctant to sign the authority which my minister has placed before me. And yet how can I refuse to sign it? Does what you have told me justify such a refusal on my part?"

Ahmed did not feel that these words were really addressed to him, and he therefore made no attempt to answer the questions they contained. But as the Grand Duke rose and walked over towards one of the windows, he also got up from his chair and stood in an attitude of watchful attention. For several minutes the older man looked out at the dripping trees that cut the white landscape with their gaunt black blanches; then, as if he had gained some fresh inspiration from this cheerless view, he turned his eyes towards the erect figure of the doctor, and said —

"What you have told me proves this woman to be without the moral sense. But although she is certainly depraved it does not necessarily follow that she is insane."

"All I urge on her behalf is, that her mind is not normal, and that she acted under the influence of another," said Ahmed.

"Yes; but that view is not borne out by the facts which came to light at the trial. She knew that Giesecke was in the habit of carrying a large sum of money on him, and she appears to have enticed him to the house where he met his death in order to give her lover an opportunity of murdering him."

"I contend that she had no alternative but to obey this man."

"Still she must have realised what he intended to do. It was a cold-blooded, carefully prepared busi-

ness, and, though I am no jurist, I see clearly that she ought to share the fate of her accomplice," said the Grand Duke, going over to the table and taking a document from among the papers in the open portfolio. "Therefore, unless you can produce some more cogent reason why I should not sign this ——"

"You cannot sign it to-day, your Royal Highness."

"Why not?"

"Because that dressing should on no account be disturbed," said Ahmed, pointing to the bandage on the Grand Duke's right hand.

"Well, to-morrow, or the next day, then?"

"Perhaps! It will entirely depend upon whether the inflammation becomes acute, and to prevent that your arm must have complete rest."

"Very good; there is no immediate hurry. The execution does not take place for two or three weeks," and the Grand Duke shut up the portfolio, intimating, with a dignified bend of the head, that the audience was over.

"I am glad of that, sir," said the doctor, who paid as little regard to Court etiquette as he did to that of his own profession, and who had throughout spoken to the Grand Duke with the freedom which can only exist between those of more or less equal rank, though with the proper respect which a young man should show to his senior. "For I would suggest," he went on, "that you made use of what I cannot help considering a providential delay to satisfy yourself as to the woman's state of mind."

"You mean," said the Grand Duke, quickly, looking hard at the stranger who thus ventured, as it were, to

prescribe his line of action in this matter, "that I should see her myself?"

"No, sir," answered Ahmed, with an accent of anxiety which betrayed the apprehension of some unexpected danger. "There is no need that your Royal Highness should put yourself to such trouble: it would be quite sufficient if you instructed a qualified psychologist to visit the prisoner and make a report upon her mental condition. You would thus get a trustworthy and perfectly unbiassed opinion."

"Should I?" the Grand Duke said, half to himself. "Trustworthy, no doubt; but perfectly unbiassed, I question that. No, my friend, these specialists in mental disorders are ready to certify you or me or any one else insane, at a moment's notice. If I am to adopt your suggestion I must choose an adviser upon whom I can rely."

"This is not a case in which the opinion of a layman, even if he were a legal expert, would be of any value."

"I do not propose to visit Zwirnau myself, and therefore I shall not send a layman, Dr. Ahmed. But if I ask one of the first medical authorities in Europe to go there will that content you? Have you any objection to offer to the name of Geheimrat Weigand?"

"None whatever, of course. If my illustrious chief can find the time his verdict must be conclusive." Ahmed said this in a confident tone, but his voice lacked the note of enthusiasm; and, from the falling of his lower jaw, a keener observer than the Grand Duke would have gathered that, for some unaccountable cause, he was disappointed at the selection. Still,

however strong his reasons may have been for preferring the judgment of an ordinary mental expert to that of the great surgeon in this particular case, he was careful not to show them openly. And it was soon arranged that, if the Grand Duke's adjutant could persuade Weigand to see Marie Schüler, Dr. Ahmed should be spared for a few hours in order that he might meet his distinguished colleague at Zwirnau, and bring back the Professor's confidential report upon her mental condition.

After he had paid another visit to his patient, and had told her attendant not on any account to rouse her out of the light slumber in which he found her, Ahmed went to his own room, took off his coat, and flung himself upon the bed in which he had not yet had a chance of sleeping. But notwithstanding his long watch in the sick-room, he rose in less than two hours' time, and, having dipped his head in a basin of cold water, was soon wide awake again. He then comfortably settled himself on the sofa by the round table which stood near the window, and at once began to write a letter that had evidently been framed already.

"My dear Elsa," it ran, "this is the first moment I have had to myself since I arrived yesterday morning before daybreak at Wilhelmsbrunn. I am afraid I shall be away for some time, as my patient, the Countess Lichtenthal, has burned herself very badly; and if we cannot do something for her she will only recover to find herself hideous. You will admit that such a fate would be worse than death to a pretty woman, and applaud me for trying to save her from it. Of course

this will be difficult, and not a thing I can manage here. But I could remove her in a week or so, if the Grand Duke, her husband, consents to my operating. I wish I had you here to do the nursing, for I am far from satisfied with the women the Court doctor has engaged, and would rather have you single-handed. They are convent-taught, both of them, and cannot even turn the patient in bed properly, but fancy they know all about nursing, and look hurt if one tells them anything. I hope to get rid of these sisters of ignorance soon, as I am glad to say I have already got rid of their sponsor, the Hofrat Engelbrecht. You would have laughed had you heard this ridiculous person informing the Grand Duke last night that he did not propose to come any more unless his Royal Highness particularly desired him to do so. The old Prince, who is not without a vein of dry humour, replied, that he could not think of troubling such a busy man to drive all that way again for nothing. I was not sorry to see the last of him, as he must have been a hindrance to me in my treatment of the case.

"What my exact method will be, when the time comes for operation, I cannot yet say, but I know of a source from which I could take the material required to repair the extensive loss of skin tissue that the Countess has sustained. The manner in which this is done will depend on whether that unfortunate woman at Zwirnau is to be executed. The Grand Duke has asked Professor Weigand to decide her fate; and though the chief does not hold the most advanced views with regard to criminal responsibility, I feel sure that he cannot bring himself to pronounce sentence of death

on a fellow-creature. I would not be so sure if the decision were in your hands, Elsa, for I remember how prejudiced you were against Marie Schüler before she was implicated in the murder. You are an ideal nurse, and working with you has spoiled me. I have no patience with these clumsy-fingered women here in consequence. Still, with all your cleverness, you are just as quick as any other of your sex to take an unreasoning dislike to a woman you have never seen. I think some one must have told you that I used once to admire Marie's big blue eyes and flaxen hair. But, if I did, it was before you taught me that a red halo, like that of your favourite Madonna at Dresden, was the most perfect setting to a pale face. And, when I discovered all that we could be to one another, I soon forgot this singing girl. What interested me specially in her was her extraordinary sensitiveness to the exercise of will-power, which was so great that I came to the conlusion that she could not be held directly responsible for her actions, her mind being the mere reflex of another's.

"I have given much study to this subject; and it was only natural that I should attempt to overcome the control which Mnischko had acquired over her. It would take too long to describe how I did this, or how she again fell under that man's sinister influence. But you know to what purpose he used his power, and thus why, when this woman was put on trial for her life, I could not agree with you that I should have remained silent. If I had done so, I should have felt myself a murderer. I am aware that your desire was to protect my professional reputation. However, you forgot one

important fact; people do not employ a surgeon because he is respectable, but because he is skilful. And when this dreadful thing had been done, when I had confessed to having wasted my nights in that terrible place where Mariska sung, no one seemed the least distressed. Why, even that most dignified of men, the Grand Duke, did not lift so much as an eyebrow, although I told him a great deal more than I judged it necessary to tell in court. My sole regret is that I did no good, that my evidence was not regarded as sufficient to prove that the woman had no independent will of her own. And even now I am by no means certain that she will escape the doom which hangs over her. But I shall not give up all hope of saving her from it yet awhile."

Ahmed brought his letter to an end with a few brief messages of affection and a request that the recipient should give Fritzchen a pat on his behalf. Then, having folded the three closely written sheets of notepaper together, he placed them in an envelope which he had already addressed to Fräulein Hartvig, care of Frau Wittwe Mänkel, Leipzig, Brüderstrasse, 14, III.

* * * * * * * *

No sooner had the Professor returned to his rooms, on the evening of Christmas day, than, in spite of the fatigues of the journey and an almost sleepless night, he set to work to finish his paper on the new anæsthetic. But while enumerating its many advantages, he did not omit to state that it had not always been perfectly constant in its action. This, he pointed out, would no doubt be found due to some impurity in the extract

they had used; and, when properly standardised, he felt confident the solution would give uniform results. It had already saved an immense amount of suffering to the animals they had operated upon for injuries of a character which could not otherwise have been dealt with; notably in the case of the dachshund Fritz, whose hind leg was so crushed that amputation seemed the only possible course.

However, when he left off writing, Weigand reflected that as yet he had no experience of how this stuff would act upon a human being. He still regarded the disclosure of its existence as premature, but had been forced into making it by the unauthorised and erroneous descriptions of the drug which had already appeared in the newspapers. Nevertheless he felt certain that the time had come when it might be used in the case of one who was a free agent, or for whom relatives decided with a full knowledge of the risk. And for this reason he had not opposed Ahmed's suggestion, though he wished that it might have been possible to make a more exhaustive test of the drug's action beforehand.

Next day the Professor entered the large lecture hall at the Physiological Institute, punctually as ever, on the stroke of three. A look round the crowded benches that ascended in semicircles almost to the top of the room would have had a cheering effect upon him at any other time. But on that day he was unable entirely to banish from his thoughts the picture of a beautiful woman, whose tear-stained features were contracted with pain, and whose bright, blue eyes seemed to follow him with a pathetic look of appeal. The feeling of distress which this memory occasioned him was inten-

sified by an accident that occurred during the course of his lecture. He had attempted to show the cause of a certain functional disturbance connected with the process of breathing, and had employed a live rabbit for the purpose; but for once he had proved unsuccessful in a public demonstration. The animal's larynx had collapsed under pressure, and after a brief flutter of the heart it had died.

The failure of this experiment had caused an outbreak of laughter amongst some of the less serious students, on hearing which the Professor had turned his leonine head in their direction, and said, with an accent of scornful pity, "I can see nothing in the death of a rabbit to provoke a smile." Still, much as he despised these stupid young men, he could not altogether acquit himself of blame. Had the force applied from his apparatus been too great, or were the breathing organs of the little creature abnormally weak? He regretted the absence of Ahmed, to whom he had grown used to look for the careful selection and preparation of his subjects. And, as he left the hall when his lecture was over, the Professor seriously asked himself whether it were possible that he no longer retained the same firm hold over his mind. Had his thoughts strayed, for an instant, back to that bedroom in the palace? It almost appeared that this might have been the case. And what if it were? All men are subject to such momentary wanderings of the mind. All but one class of men, surgeons; they must have perfect control over every fibre of the brain. And, so long as they shall operate, they must have absolute confidence in themselves. Perhaps, then, the day was coming when

Curtius von Weigand would have to give up practical work. Something would of course remain to him in the way of consultation, but the glory of his life would be gone.

With this discomforting reflection he had nearly reached the Augustus Platz when an officer in undress uniform suddenly accosted him. "Have I the honour of addressing Privy Councillor von Weigand?" he asked, with a military salute.

"That is my name," said the Professor, directing a puzzled look at the fresh-coloured, blunt features; blond, upturned moustache, and attentive, spectacled eyes of his questioner.

"Captain von Bredowshausen, Flügeladjutant to his Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Thüringen," said the soldier, after bringing his heels together with a click and making a courtier-like bow.

"Very great pleasure," murmured Weigand. "I ought to have known you at once. You were with his Royal Highness at the railway-station. I hope you are not the bearer of bad news."

"No; I was to tell you that Countess Lichtenthal is progressing favourably."

"Ah, that's good! It was very kind of the Grand Duke to let me know."

"Serenissimus entrusted me with a further message. He would have sent a letter, but, as you know, he is not yet able to write, and he judged the matter too private to be telegraphed. I have already been to your house ——"

"If you will be so good as to return there with me, Captain von Bredowshausen," said the Professor, "it

is only a few steps, and I shall then be able to listen to you without fear of interruption." He conducted the soldier first through a wide carriage-entrance into a stone-paved courtyard, and then through an inner doorway; then on up the broad staircase that led to his own floor and into his reception-room. As soon as his guest was seated, Weigand invited him to begin, by saying, "Now, I am all attention."

"His Royal Highness," said Bredowshausen, taking a cigar from the box which the Professor had pushed towards him, "charged me to explain first, that he felt he was asking a great favour, especially after your kindness in coming to Wilhelmsbrunn."

"Well?" said the Professor, with a nod of encouragement.

"He wishes you to see a woman who is under sentence of death at Zwirnau."

"Marie Schüler?" The woman on whose behalf my assistant gave evidence."

"Yes; you will remember the case, of course. She was implicated with a male accomplice in the murder of a Hamburg merchant. Her advocate raised the question of her sanity, but she was nevertheless condemned, and she will be executed, unless you can report that she is not responsible for her actions."

"But why doesn't the Grand Duke appeal to a recognised authority in psychology?" said Weigand, spreading out his hands with a gesture of astonishment.

"I don't know," replied the soldier, pulling hard at his cigar in an heroic effort to suppress a smile at the great man's simplicity. "Perhaps he has little faith in

mental specialists, or perhaps he relies much on your judgment, Herr Geheimrat."

"That is flattering on the part of his Royal Highness; still, we doctors are always unwilling to travel out of our proper sphere."

"I fancy you would find it rather difficult to do that, Herr Professor," said von Bredowshausen. "Besides, as you said just now, your colleague, Dr. Ahmed, has already pronounced upon the woman's state of mind."

"Yes; but he had known something of her before — that is why he was called upon to give evidence, you see."

"That is also why Serenissimus cannot accept his view as final, unless you support it."

"He has discussed the matter with my young friend, then?"

"I believe so! And if agreeable to your Excellency, Dr. Ahmed would meet you in Zwirnau to-morrow, at any time you appoint."

Weigand picked up the state railway-guide, which seemed to open of itself at the page he had looked at two days before; then, running his finger down the long columns of names, he suddenly brought it to a halt, and said —

"I will be there at midday."

IX

A FEW minutes before noon next day Ahmed was already waiting on the arrival-platform of the railway-station at Zwirnau. Being used to a far colder winter than that of Central Europe, he had not yet found any need to put on his heavy sheepskin overcoat. His appearance thus formed a striking contrast to that of Weigand, who descended from the Leipzig train, a little later, wrapped from head to foot in furs. The great surgeon turned up the big beaver collar of his coat and pressed his sealskin cap well down over his ears, before getting into the sledge that Ahmed had engaged for them. But his ruddy cheeks showed how near to the surface the warm blood still coursed, as he said, settling himself in his seat, "It is colder than ever, my son." The young man made no reply to this remark; indeed, as the wind blew hard in their faces and the Professor's ears were covered, no conversation was possible during the drive up to the castle.

They passed in silence through the narrow streets of the old-world town, which had been little changed by the enormous economic progress of recent years. Zwirnau still wore the aspect of a fortified burg in the Middle Ages, and, as the sun sparkled upon the irregular, snow-covered roofs and the leaden-framed window-panes, thrown into high-relief by the dark carved

oak-beams that supported the overhanging façades, Weigand was delighted with the succession of pictures of a feudal city in midwinter which presented themselves to his all-observant eyes. Gradually the sledge drew clear of the town, and passed beneath the frowning walls of the fortress, portions of which were coeval with the Roman occupation.

The doctors were allowed to enter unchallenged at the main gate, and were driven through the great outer court into a smaller inner court. The sledge stopped before an iron-clamped door in a gloomy wing, that was obviously more modern than its surroundings, though the character of the original structure had been carefully preserved.

Directly they had alighted the sentry on guard pulled a chain on the side of the doorway, which caused a big bell to reverberate through the entire building.

After some little delay the door was thrown open, and a bearded janitor in a dark uniform appeared in the entrance. Whereupon Ahmed handed him a letter with an official seal, bidding him to have it delivered, at once, to the Governor of the prison.

"Meal time," the man answered gruffly; "the Freiherr is not to be disturbed on any account." Then, after looking at them inquiringly, he added, "Unless you are invited to the midday table?"

"We have not that honour," said Ahmed; "but we bring a letter from his Royal Highness ——"

"It is from the Grand Duke himself?"

"Yes."

"Even so," replied the man, shaking his head, "I may not disturb him. Those are his orders. 'Lud-

wig,' he says to me, 'I will look at nothing when I am at meals; not even if it is a telegram from the Emperor.'"

"Do you mean to say, then, that Privy Councillor von Weigand must be kept waiting until your master has finished his food?"

"That would not be necessary," answered Ludwig, with increased respect, "if the Privy Councillor will consent to see our chief warder." And, upon a nod of agreement from Weigand, he offered to go himself in search of this less inaccessible personage. After admitting the two strangers into the dark entrance-hall and closing the massive door behind them, he invited them to be seated before a blazing fire of coke in a little room off it, that served as a porter's lodge. He then clattered away into the recesses of the prison.

While the Professor was slowly thawing himself, he told Ahmed that he regarded this visit to Zwirnau as a mere formality, and had only undertaken it in order to add weight to the opinion the young man had already pronounced.

"I am sure to take the same view that you did, since we both see things as they are and without prejudgment," he said, looking with undisguised approval at his favourite pupil.

"If that be so in my case, sir," said Ahmed, "it is because you have shown me how to do it." But there was a lack of responsiveness in his tone, as though his mind was not altogether free from doubt.

"I was glad to see you at the station this morning," continued Weigand, "for I knew then that your patient at Wilhelmsbrunn was getting on well."

"Countess Lichtenthal was sleeping quietly when I

left, and I think I may safely say that the improvement of yesterday is maintained."

"Good, good! You'd hardly believe it, Ahmed, but that lady's face has haunted me. Ever since I saw her I have been thinking what she must have been like before the accident. No ordinary type of beauty, and well worth preserving for its own sake, even if it were not necessary to save her good looks in order to make the remainder of her life endurable."

The Professor was musing thus, half to himself, when the bearded Ludwig returned with a short, thick-set, middle-aged man.

"Herr Holtzmann," he said, introducing his companion to the two doctors.

The chief warder, who was not by any means devoid of intelligence, saw at once with what class of visitor he had to deal, and put on as gracious a manner as his own exalted official position would allow.

"Might I ask," said he, "to what fortunate circumstance we owe the pleasure of the Privy Councillor's visit?"

"I am here to see a woman who is awaiting execution," replied Weigand.

"It is permitted to no one to see a condemned prisoner, except relations and, of course, the priest, if his presence is desired, and the doctor."

"I am a doctor, and so is my friend."

"Yes; but I mean our own doctor."

"Herr Holtzmann," said the Professor, "I have been requested to see this woman by his Royal Highness; that letter" — he here pointed to the sealed envelope which the big porter still held in his hand — "is my

authority, and, as my time is precious, I must beg you to have it delivered to the Governor without further delay, if you are unable to act on your own responsibility."

The chief warder looked, first at the letter, and then at Weigand, who was rapidly growing impatient. Then, after a moment's pause, he said, in a tone that still betrayed certain misgivings, "Very well, I will prepare the woman for your reception."

"That is exactly what I do not want you to do," said Weigand. "I wish to see Marie Schüler without her being told anything about the purpose of my visit; that is why I asked the Grand Duke not to announce my coming beforehand."

"But would it not be better, perhaps, if she were warned that some one had come to see her?" said Ahmed.

"No, my friend," replied the Professor, "I do not even want her to know that I have come to see her at all. Herr Holtzmann will conduct me to her cell, and present me to the person in charge of the prisoner, as if I were some one who was making an official tour of inspection; but, not on any account, as a doctor."

The chief warder, who, when unable to give orders to others, loved to receive them himself, bowed in acknowledgment of the commands that the Professor had thus directly laid upon him.

"Moreover, as the woman knows you, Ahmed, I think it will be best that I should first see her alone; I shall, if necessary, ask you to join me later."

There could be no doubt this time that the young man was diasppointed at the turn events had taken, so

much so indeed that, though he said nothing, he showed it plainly enough by the way in which he shrugged his shoulders. Something characteristic in his manner must have attracted the attention of Holtzmann, who had already moved towards the door, for he turned back and said —

"Excuse me, Dr. Ahmed, for not recognising you. It was you, of course, who visited the prisoner before the trial. You were sent here by Rechtsanwalt Ehrlich. But since you saw her, the poor creature has grown much more silent, almost dumb, in fact; no one can now get an intelligent word out of her, not even the women who look after her."

Having delivered himself of this piece of news, he respectfully beckoned the Professor to follow him down a long stone corridor, to a spiral iron staircase in the centre of the building. And as Weigand marched after his sturdy leader, the deep furrows of his brow were drawn together into a curiously thoughtful frown, as though some problem had recently presented itself to his mind that was capable of no satisfactory solution.

His pupil's face would certainly have furnished the answer, had not Ahmed been trained from earliest youth to control the expression of his emotions. It had not been safe for any one in the house of the Ameer to show displeasure at the will of the chief; not even for his own son. So that, great as the annoyance was which Ahmed felt at the inopportune announcement of the change that had taken place in Mariska after his second visit, he kept it to himself, and, like a wise man, turned the time of enforced inaction to the best possible advantage.

"Is Dr. Meissener still here?" he asked the porter. Ludwig replied that the prison doctor had been unable to get leave of absence, and would have to stay at Zwirnau until after the execution. He also informed him that the doctor was anxious to get away, not having had a holiday for over a year and being worn out by the monotony of his work.

"It is a hard life for us all," said the man, shaking his head, "from the Governor downwards."

"I can understand that," said Ahmed. "You must have a holiday sometimes or you would go out of your minds. It is a good rule of your Governor's to leave the prison behind him at meal times. Still I almost think you ought to have that letter placed in his hands directly he rises from table."

"Yes," the porter answered, "you are right! As it is, he may be angry. But what is one to do? One must obey orders! However, I will see that he gets it the moment he has finished his midday meal."

With these words, Ludwig hurried out of the room and quickly turned down a passage at right angles to the main corridor, his keys jangling at his side as he strode away over the flagstones.

As soon as Ahmed was alone he sank into the porter's chair, with his legs crossed and his head inclined slightly forward, in the attitude of one who was about to snatch a few moments' sleep. But he nevertheless remained wide awake, and began rapidly to concentrate his attention upon the lapis-lazuli signet-ring on the little finger of his left hand, which rested on his knee. After he had focussed his eyes upon the blue stone for a little time the clear-cut Arabic letters engraved

on it became blurred; and before long the young man's limbs grew rigid. He had, indeed, thrown himself into that state of nervous tension in which, it appears, certain highly developed individuals can project the energy of their minds outside their bodies, and thus, at some distance, exert a controlling influence upon the actions of others, over whose wills they have on previous occasions obtained command.

Meanwhile the Professor had followed Herr Holtzmann up the iron stairs to the next floor, down a long gallery, and through two heavy doors into a separate portion of the prison. Holtzmann informed him that this was the new infirmary block, which had only recently been completed, and had hitherto been unoccupied, except by the prison doctor. The female prisoner had been quartered here, he explained, partly because the Governor was interested in her case — the Herr Geheimrat would guess the reason when he saw her — and partly because the condemned cells were so dark that those confined there had been known to go out of their minds.

"The man Mnischko is in one of them," he added, pointing downwards, "but he does not seem to care what happens to him now, so long as he has enough to eat and drink. He is resigned to his fate, like most criminals after trial, when they have no hope of pardon."

They had nearly reached the end of the corridor when Holtzmann halted and called the Professor's attention to a low archway in the wall facing them.

"There," he said, "it is through that gate they will have to pass when they start on their long journey. It will be some way for him to come down from there,

and I dare say we shall have to give him a helping hand; but it won't be far for her. She is here."

He proceeded to tap sharply with his keys on the iron-studded door to their right, before which they were now standing. After a few moments a small panel behind an iron grill in the door was drawn back and a woman's face appeared in the opening.

"I have brought you a visitor, Frau Schmidt," said the chief warder, unlocking the door.

"Well," answered the woman, in a thin, querulous voice, "I am sure he is welcome. It is a treat to see a human face after being mewed up with a dumb animal for hours."

"May I open, then? Is your charge presentable?"

"Oh yes; she never neglects her personal appearance. You can come in."

As Weigand entered, a stout, elderly woman with grizzled hair, stepping aside, dropped him a curtsey, and he then became aware of another woman at the farther end of the room. She was seated by a tall earthenware stove, in a crouching position. Her figure was bathed in a flood of light, which poured down through a high barred window, making the strands of yellow hair that escaped from the blue cotton handkerchief she had tied about her head look like spun gold. She did not seem to have noticed the entrance of the two men, and continued to move her fingers slowly in the air as though laboriously picking out a melody on some stringed instrument. Nor did the Professor do anything on his part to attract her attention, but ostensibly devoted himself to Frau Schmidt. He began by asking her a series of questions,

in the manner of one who was studying the conditions of prison life, rather than in that of a doctor. Then, without any apparent purpose, he inquired if her charge slept well.

"Oh yes," replied Frau Schmidt, "when I have been on night duty, she has always slept sound enough."

"That's good," said he, still careful not to appear more interested in the subject than politeness demanded. "She gives very little trouble, then; and she's always as neat and tidy as she is now, eh?"

"Yes, indeed. Marie takes a pride in herself; she may be wanting, but she knows the value of her good looks."

Weigand, who had intentionally turned his back to the prisoner, looked quickly round and caught her eyes fixed full upon him. She had listened, then; and there was an expression in her face which indicated the presence of a certain amount of intelligence; a low order, perhaps, but not that blank detachment from external affairs she had at first exhibited. A hot flush came to the woman's cheek when she felt herself surprised, and, for a moment, her mobile mouth was twisted into a curious smile that flickered also about the corners of her blue eyes. It was that half-plaintive, half-defiant look with which an attractive woman will sometimes greet a stranger. But as Weigand steadily returned her glance, Marie dropped her eyes and folded her hands upon her lap in an attitude of appeal. And, after he had gazed at her for a little while, he gradually perceived the wonderful grace and the superb contour of her features. He was astonished, too, by

the singular resemblance they bore to those of the face he had been trying to picture in its normal aspect.

"Yes," he thought, "that is how Countess Lichtenthal would look when her features were in repose. She would carry her head a trifle better, perhaps, and she could not possibly have shaped her lips into that servile curve; but, in form and colouring, her face would be just such another masterpiece of nature as this."

Weigand, whose profound knowledge of anatomy had given him a sense of beauty almost as great as that of the artist, was, for the moment, lost in admiration of this supremely beautiful creature.

"Could it be possible that behind so fair a face there lurked a sordid soul? Yes," he reflected, "such anomalies have been known, and their existence is the great difficulty in the establishment of any true system of physiognomy." Soon, however, remembering that he was not immediately concerned with this general speculation, but with the more particular question as to whether the woman's brain was disordered, he began to revolve in his mind the means by which he might directly put this matter to the test. First it was necessary that he should see her eyes again. In order to do this at his ease he walked over to her, and placing his hand gently upon her head turned it towards the window.

"Do you suffer any pain here?" he said, and, as she did not answer his question, he added in that soothing tone all good doctors possess, "any sensation, I mean, in the top of your head?"

The woman still remained silent. Then Weigand,

beginning to suspect that she actually did not hear him, bent down and looked hard into her half-closed eyes.

"Strange," he muttered to himself, "very strange; a few moments ago the woman was wide awake, and now she is almost asleep."

"She has just shut her eyes!" exclaimed Frau Schmidt, who had been eagerly watching.

"Yes, and I doubt if we could make her open them," said the Professor. "Have you seen her in this state before? Come here and look at her carefully!"

"No, sir," replied the attendant, drawing closer, "I don't remember ever to have seen her sit quite so still as that, though she has often moved very little for an hour at a time."

The Professor grasped the upper part of Marie Schüler's arm with one hand and her wrist with the other. He then tried to bend it, but finding that it resisted a considerable amount of pressure, he allowed it to drop again by her side in a lifeless fashion.

"Is there anything wrong, sir?" said Frau Schmidt, with an anxious side-glance in the direction of Holtzmann, who had stood motionless in the doorway all the while. "You don't think she has gone off?"

"Fainted, eh? No, my good Frau Schmidt," replied Weigand. "The woman is in a cataleptic condition, but I do not imagine it will last long, and there is no danger unless she were roughly or suddenly disturbed. You must let her come to of her own accord, that is all!"

Having given these instructions, the Professor made a sign to Holtzmann that he was ready to go, where-

upon the attentive warder immediately unlocked the door and ushered him out of the room.

"Now," said Weigand, looking at his watch, "my time is short, and I would like to see this fellow Mnischko. It is no part of my errand; but it may throw some light on what at present seems dark."

Once Holtzmann had made up his slow-moving mind that the Professor was a personage whose commands were to be obeyed, he was prepared to do anything required of him with alacrity. So that before long he had led Weigand down a dingy winding stone stairway below the level of the ground, from the foot of which he conducted him through one dim-lit passage after another until they had reached a low iron door. Holtzmann again struck the door three times with a key, and after a short time it was opened from within by a well-set-up young man in the same sombre uniform as that worn by the chief warder. But even after the Professor had entered, it took him several seconds before he could make out objects distinctly. He then perceived that he was standing in a huge stone chamber, lighted by one long narrow opening in the vaulted roof. A thin ray of sunshine which penetrated through this fell upon a rough wooden table near the opposite wall, and rendered two men who were seated on stools at each side of it just visible to the eye that had grown accustomed to the prevailing gloom. One of these was a uniformed attendant, and the other a middle-aged man with a shock of rough iron-grey hair and a white stubble of beard. Mnischko had been playing a game of skat with his two guardians, and his attention was deeply engrossed in the greasy cards he

held in his knotted, grimy fingers. Putting the hand down on the table with a grunt of annoyance at the interruption, he turned to see who the intruder was, and when he caught sight of a tall dark figure in the doorway, he made an impatient gesture as though to wave it away.

"No good your coming here, friend!" he cried out. "No priest or parson or preacher for me. Let the dead bury the dead. There is a text for you! Twist it into some meaning, if you can, and with that, *Basta.*"

He said all this quickly, and in a bantering tone, as though the matter were of no moment; but he nevertheless contrived to express profound contempt for the supposed office of his visitor.

Weigand, who had watched the man's face with intense curiosity, and who had listened to his words with an even greater interest, answered quietly,

"My business is with the living; I am a physician."

"Pardon," said Mnischko, rising to his feet, and bowing with both hands folded on his breast. "If the barin is a doctor I make him my compliment. But I have no need of his services. I am in excellent health for a man about to die; and I do not even pretend to be mad. It's not worth the trouble!"

This last statement caused the Professor to lift his bushy eyebrows with a movement of surprise.

"Permit me to ask one question," he said, pointing to the cards upon the table. "How long have you been engaged upon this game, my friend?"

"How long would it be?" said Mnischko, turning to the warder nearest to him. "An hour?"

"Not so long," replied the warder.

"Over half-an-hour?" asked Weigand.

"Nearer three-quarters," he answered, after glancing at his watch.

"It was a beer-skat," explained Mnischko; "we play for three glasses when we have any money ——"

"Might I be allowed?" said the Professor, addressing this request for permission to Holtzmann.

"Certainly, the Herr Geheimrat can give anything in reason," said the chief warder. "He may always buy cigars, and occasionally a glass of beer. He does not often get the chance though. The fellow hasn't so many admirers as the lady upstairs. She has flowers, and boxes of sweets, and offers of marriage sent to her every day."

This was obviously news to Mnischko, who testified to the disgust with which it filled him by spitting upon the ground, while a dark scowl spread itself over his face; but his expression soon changed to one of absolute contentment when Weigand placed a twenty-mark piece on the table before him. The man was so overwhelmed by such unexpected generosity that he could hardly stammer forth his thanks. And the Professor left him gazing intently at the gold coin, as though he almost believed that it would vanish if he stretched out his hand to touch it.

"A curious type," Weigand thought, as he slowly ascended from these subterranean abodes, "prominent frontal ridge, small eyes, and powerful jaw; a throwback, perhaps, to one of our early ancestors. Hardy in the pursuit of pleasure, and indifferent to pain; not incapable of gratitude, but more prone to revenge.

A less responsible creature, in many ways, than the woman who shared his crime."

The Professor was met at the top of the steps by Baron von Baltzan, a handsome, well-preserved man of fifty, who appeared to be in a tremendous state of excitement, and who had evidently been in search of him.

"My dear Privy Councillor," he said, coming forward with both hands outstretched, and grasping those of the Professor with much warmth. "Forgive me for not having welcomed you before. But this fellow" — indicating the big porter with a jerk of his head — "interpreted something I had said in joke as an order, and delayed to inform me of your Excellency's arrival. It would, of course, have given me the very greatest pleasure to put myself at your disposal. I regret exceedingly that ——"

"Believe me, it is quite unnecessary," said Weigand, as soon as he could decently interrupt the effusive apologies of the Governor. "Your deputy here has shown me all that I wished to see, thank you."

"I am glad to hear it; but if there is anything I could do myself, pray command me."

"There is nothing, unless you would be so good as to ask your people to fetch me a drosky."

"You shall have my own carriage. Oh, I insist upon it!" said the Governor. "Where is my orderly? Ludwig, bustle yourself and call the man; tell him to hurry. Do you hear?"

Baron von Baltzan was so anxious to do everything in his power for the Professor's comfort, and looked so genuinely distressed when he declined to take any

refreshment, that Weigand could not bring himself to hurt the Governor's feelings by persisting in his refusal. Having beckoned to Ahmed, who had been chatting with a jovial little man in the entrance-hall, he allowed Von Baltzan to lead them through a side passage into his private apartments, which were furnished in the most luxurious style. There, while the Governor's soldier-servant offered them caviar sandwiches and various liqueurs, Ahmed introduced his diminutive companion, who was no other than the prison doctor, to the Professor.

Meissener at once expressed the utmost disappointment that he, too, had not had the privilege of placing himself at the service of his distinguished colleague.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Ahmed before," he said, "and, for his sake also, I would like to have done the honours. I am afraid he found himself shamefully neglected though. Imagine, Herr Geheimrat, I discovered him all alone by the fire in the porter's room there. But he must have been thinking deeply over some matter, for I had considerable difficulty in attracting his attention. If his eyes had been shut I should have fancied the coke had sent him to sleep. It has that effect sometimes, no doubt."

"No doubt!" said the Professor, glancing at Ahmed.

X

AGAIN the Professor and his pupil drove in silence through the quaint old town, and on under a narrow arch in the city wall to the big railway-station, which triumph of modern ugliness the good people of Zwirnau have wisely kept outside their gates. Even when they had reached the comparative shelter of the great glass roof Weigand did not seem in a mood to talk. He marched up and down the departure-platform for several minutes, deep in thought. Then suddenly turning to Ahmed, who had walked by his side without attempting to utter a word, he said, "I will accompany you to Wilhelmsbrunn. It will serve two purposes, for I shall then be able to give the Grand Duke my opinion on this woman, and I can have another look at your patient."

Anxious as Ahmed was to know what judgment the Professor had arrived at in the case of Marie Schüler, he forbore to ask him any direct question on the point. But this was not so much due to the restrictive influence of medical etiquette as to the fact that he augured ill for the woman from Weigand's reticence. He therefore made no comment upon the Professor's decision, beyond vaguely expressing the pleasure it gave him; and, when the local train for Mittelburg had been backed into the station, they both silently mounted into a com-

partment to which the railway officials attached an iron label, proclaiming it to be reserved, and for some time after the train had started neither of them spoke. At last Weigand broke the silence by calling his companion's attention to the view of the now distant town that a curve in the line had just brought in sight.

"Look here, my friend!" he said, pointing to the cluster of red roofs that followed the steep hillside up towards the dark, frowning walls of the fortress, "that is a picture of what our German land looked like in the days when force was the sole argument. Observe the way in which these fat chickens nestled under the wing of the lean hawk who poised himself aloft there ready to strike at any less powerful foe.

"Doubtless the burghers paid dearly for such aristocratic patronage; still they had reason to feel secure under the protection of that great gaunt citadel. For, though it has been attacked and its outworks battered to pieces times out of number, its gates have but once opened to an enemy; and then only through treachery."

"Ah!" exclaimed the young man, gazing back on the dark irregular mass of buildings which, broken by numerous conical-topped towers, stood out against the skyline above Zwirnau, in the deep red glow of the setting sun. "In our country that is the first way we try to take a fort."

"And if it fails?"

"We wait till the enemy have ceased to watch for our coming."

"Not an ineffective method either," said Weigand, with a thoughtful smile, and again relapsed into silence.

Neither of them said anything more during the rest

of the short railway journey, nor while they were driving from the station at Mittelburg up to Wilhelmsbrunn. On reaching the palace they at once hastened to the Countess Lichtenthal's apartments. They had not long entered the room where their patient was lying before they discovered that an unexpected change had taken place in her condition. Ahmed had left her in the morning in a restful state, and he was therefore surprised to notice several unfavourable symptoms. The Professor also, who had formed a very favourable opinion from the report given him by his pupil, experienced the same feeling of disappointment. From the extent of her injuries he had expected to find the patient feverish, but he had certainly hoped not to find her delirious. Yet the Countess was moving from side to side, muttering to herself continuously; and though no distinct idea could be gathered of what was in her mind, her words conveyed the general notion of some prevailing horror. Unable to ascertain the cause of her trouble from the woman's broken and inconsecutive sentences, the Professor, after having had an ice-pack applied to her head, addressed himself to the nurse in order to find out what had produced this delirium.

Sister Anna protested that she knew of nothing which could have excited the Countess, but on being closely questioned as to everything that had occurred during the doctor's absence, she admitted that madame had experienced great concern when the wounds about her neck had been re-dressed.

"Why were the bandages removed?" asked Ahmed, interrupting her. "Did they become loose?"

"No," replied the nurse, "but Sister Elizabeth and I thought they ought to be renewed; we imagined that you had forgotten."

"Forgotten! they should not have been touched for another twelve hours! There," he added, appealing to Weigand, "what can one do with such idiots?" and then turning to the nurse again, "Well, what happened?"

"Madame was quite herself, and wished to see how she appeared," said the nurse, in a deprecating tone. "She would not be satisfied when we told her that she looked just the same as she always did, but ordered us to give her a mirror."

"And you obeyed her?"

"What else could I do?" replied the woman, extending her arms with a gesture of helplessness.

"What I told you to do, you stupid creature," retorted Ahmed, fiercely, his voice almost stifled with anger.

The woman shrunk back and folded her hands on her breast, gazing at the infuriated doctor with an expression of helplessness not unmixed with reproach.

"Softly, my friend," said the Professor, putting his hand upon Ahmed's shoulder and drawing him aside, "we shall gain nothing by losing our temper; we have to consider carefully what steps we must take. In the first place, our patient will need watching night and day with the utmost attention."

"How is that to be done by these fools?" asked Ahmed, still boiling with indignation.

"We must not hurt people's feelings, my son, even if they are not very wise. After all, most of us make

mistakes sometimes," said Weigand, gravely; "but," he added, turning to the outraged sister of mercy, "I think this lady will see for herself that, if she is unable to carry out our instructions, it is impossible for us to continue to work with her." The woman mutely assented to this proposition, with a submissive nod; it being the one strong point of her training that she had been taught not to remonstrate against the wishes of those in authority, nor to make use of many words.

"We must get assistance from Leipzig, Ahmed," said Weigand.

"Exactly what I wanted to do from the first," answered the young man.

"Yes; no doubt it would have been better. Then, as I said before, we have to consider the feelings of others. Remember, we have offended Engelbrecht already. But I trust this good lady will be more reasonable. She will understand the necessity we are under, of having nurses who are accustomed to our ways."

"I know of one with whom it is a pleasure to work," said Ahmed, again ignoring the susceptibilities of the other who was present.

"Well," said Weigand, good-humouredly, "we must see if we can't persuade her to take charge of the case."

"Oh, she'll think it an honour to work for you, sir."

"Really? What's her name?"

"Hartvig. Nurse Elsa of the Weigand Clinic."

"I think I know her then. But Fräulein Hartvig will require an assistant."

"No! I can get on with her alone. I shall do night

duty myself until the patient takes a turn for the better."

"Very good!"

"Then I may send for her?"

"Yes, the moment I have explained matters to the Grand Duke. I will ask if I may see him at once."

Then, after assuring the sister, who had begun to sob when she saw her dismissal was inevitable, that he would, as far as possible, absolve her from blame, the Professor left the room.

On entering the private apartments Weigand addressed himself to a member of the household, who wore a coat the front of which was completely covered with gold lace arabesques, while embroidered on each of its tails was a golden key. This gorgeous personage, whom Weigand had not seen before, but whose uniform proclaimed to be the chamberlain on duty, smiled when he heard that the somewhat shabby-looking Professor wished to speak immediately to his Royal Highness, and declared, with an air of polite weariness, that it would be quite impossible. But in the meantime Weigand had been recognised by one of the equerries, who whispered his name to the chamberlain, whereon that listless gentleman's attitude suddenly became alert, and, with far less formality than official etiquette demanded, he hurried away to inform his Royal Highness of the great surgeon's arrival. A few moments later the Grand Duke came rapidly down the room towards Weigand, and greeted him with the utmost cordiality. He then led him through the intervening antechambers, in which several people were still waiting for an audience, into his private cabinet.

When the double doors had been closed behind them, the Professor gently broke the news of the relapse in Countess Lichtenthal's condition to her husband. And never in all his long years of practice had he experienced more difficulty in softening the blow, and endeavouring to inspire fresh hope.

At first the Grand Duke had been inclined to rage against the nurses, as the agents who had brought about this disaster; but soon he turned his rage upon himself for his folly in having let the doctor leave the palace at such a time.

"Had your assistant remained here this could not have happened," he cried. "What does the life of any other woman matter to me, compared with that of the one woman I love?"

The Professor made no attempt to check this outburst; but, when the Grand Duke had grown calmer, gradually drew him on to consider how the recurrence of any similar error of judgment could be prevented. His Royal Highness readily agreed with Weigand that the convent-trained sisters must be got rid of. A messenger was immediately despatched to Dr. Ahmed, instructing him to telegraph to Fräulein Hartvig, and, on her arrival, to send the nursing sisters about their business, and warn them in the meanwhile not to intrude themselves upon the notice of the Grand Duke.

His Royal Highness then, with a supreme effort of self-control, for the moment banished the misfortune that had befallen his wife from his thoughts. It was unlike him ever to neglect the wants of a guest, and he was horrified, on inquiry, to hear that Dr. Weigand had eaten nothing except a few sandwiches since his

early breakfast at home. Without further delay he ordered his people to have dinner served at once in the next room, which command was obeyed with the more alacrity as the food had been prepared for some time, and the cooks had already informed the major-domo that if it were not placed on the table before long it would be spoiled.

When the chamberlain had ushered the Grand Duke to his seat and had been graciously dismissed, along with the other gentlemen-in-waiting, his Royal Highness bade the Professor take the place on his right hand. But Weigand could not help seeing that his host's eyes turned mechanically towards the vacant chair on the opposite side of the small oval table, and only left it when they rested for a while on him, or wandered away to a picture at the other end of the room.

Taking advantage of the silence which fell upon them from time to time during the course of their meal, Weigand ventured to glance at this picture himself. It was the portrait of a flaxen-haired lady in a low-waisted, black velvet gown with a deep, starched ruff. She held a crucifix in one hand, while with the other she drew back her veil, disclosing a perfect profile and exquisitely modelled features, the pallor of which was accentuated by her sombre drapery and relieved by a rich blot of crimson in the delicate curve of her lips. But, life-like as the artist had made this portrait of a singularly attractive woman, its effect upon the Professor was greater than that which the mere beauty of any picture could of itself produce. At first he could scarcely credit his eyes. Surely that was the face of the woman he had seen in the prison at Zwirnau that

afternoon; the same yellow hair, touched with gold where the light fell on it, the same straight line of nose and forehead, the same full sensuous mouth; and yet, no, not quite the same, less animal, more informed with intellect; in fact, the face of a better woman. Yes, in spite of the wonderful likeness to Marie Schüler, he could see now that it was the face which had haunted him for the last few days: there were the tear-swollen and pain-distorted features of the Countess set in the smiling contentment of conscious beauty. Again the fear of what might follow on the knowledge which had been revealed to her that day possessed Weigand's mind. Could he hope that this lady's tottering reason would recover its balance? If they coud only have kept her in ignorance of the mischief the flames had worked upon her throat, until they had been able to avert its most terrible consequences, all might have been well. But once she was aware of the danger that threatened her, it would never be absent from her thoughts for a moment.

"You are looking at my wife's portrait," said the Grand Duke, who had observed the direction of his eyes.

"Yes," replied the Professor; "I was lost in admiration."

"I do not wonder at that; it is a very fine bit of painting, and wonderfully like — what she was," the Grand Duke said, with a break in his voice. "That was exactly how she appeared in the first act of 'Maria Stuart,'" he continued, gazing tenderly at the picture; "she looked too young, of course, for that unhappy queen when the hour of her execution was so near at

hand. But we thought it pardonable to suppose that time had dealt gently with her during all those bitter years of captivity. And I remember when she sat for that portrait the painter said that Amalia Paulli was not one of those who would grow old soon." A shade passed over his handsome, careworn face as he recalled these words, and his eyes became moist, so that he could no longer see the picture of her he loved.

Meanwhile the last of many dishes having been presented, the major-domo directed his subordinates to place the coffee and liqueurs on the table, together with cigars and a lighted taper. He then marshalled them quietly from the room, and retired himself, leaving the two solitary old men alone. For a considerable time they remained silent, each busy with his own thoughts, the Professor being careful not to look at his companion, who was slowly endeavouring to get the better of his emotion. When the Grand Duke had at last succeeded in doing this, he leant forward and pushed the open cigar-box nearer to Weigand, who accepted his tacit invitation with a polite gesture. After they had been smoking for some while, the Grand Duke again turned to him and said, "As to the immediate object of your visit, Herr Geheimrat: I owe the pleasure of seeing you here to a journey you were so kind as to undertake at my request to-day."

"I wished to make my report in person," said the Professor.

"Far better always, when possible. I am extremely anxious to hear what you think about this woman; because I should like to save her from such an awful fate," said the Grand Duke, looking up once more

at the picture of the queen whose head fell on the block.

"I do not see how you can well do that," replied Weigand, slowly shaking his head.

"You believe that she is accountable for her actions?"

"Quite!"

"Notwithstanding all that Dr. Ahmed says about her having acted under the influence of another?"

"Mere surmise! I saw no evidence of a predominating will-power in the man."

"Oh, you saw this Mnischko, then?"

"Yes, I found him a brute; but not, perhaps, without redeeming qualities. Certainly he has courage enough to face death without flinching."

"Oh," said the Grand Duke, who, like all brave men, greatly admired courage in others. "He impressed you more favourably than the woman?"

"I regret to say he did," replied the Professor. "He seemed less cunning than his accomplice and less cowardly. As to their relative guilt, of course I know nothing; but of this I am convinced: the woman's madness is simply a pretence."

"You think she has put it all on since the crime?"

"At the suggestion of some one. Her advocate, perhaps, but some one who saw the futility of any other line of defence. Oh, she doesn't do it badly from a lay point of view, but she has none of the constant and easily recognised symptoms of mania; otherwise I should not pronounce so unhesitating an opinion. Still it is several years now since I was in the habit of seeing such cases; and, perhaps, it would be more satisfactory if you consulted a professed psychologist."

"No," said the Grand Duke, "I shall take no other opinion but yours, Herr Geheimrat. That was what I told this young man, and he made no protest at the time. Besides, it is scarcely wonderful that he should have adopted an opposite view with regard to this woman's sanity; he told me how he had admired her when he saw her on the stage. I cannot blame him for that; but it makes me suspect the soundness of his judgment where she is concerned. By-the-bye, he also told me that he had been able to will her to do things — make her obey him, don't you know, in some mysterious way."

"Did he say that?" asked Weigand, in a tone of surprise.

"Something of the sort," the Grand Duke answered, "but I did not attach much importance to it. Those things are mostly make believe."

"Not always, though," said the Professor, gravely.

As Weigand was anxious to pay another visit to his patient before he left the palace, he shortly afterwards took leave of the Grand Duke. He did not, however, at once enter the apartments of the Countess, but walked on past them down the long corridor, with a slow, measured step, his shoulders bent and his hands clasped behind his back. He was pondering over the events of the day, unable to decide off-hand whether what had occurred would oblige him to withdraw from Ahmed that complete and unhesitating confidence he had hitherto reposed in him. For many reasons he was reluctant to come to such a conclusion. Ahmed had been recommended to his care by a colleague at St. Petersburg whom he esteemed highly. And he

had always found the young man absolutely trustworthy; he had known him intimately for some years, had travelled with him in a dangerous country, where he had proved a faithful and invaluable ally. Besides, there was between them that closest of all bonds which links the teacher and the taught. To this native of a far-off land Curtius von Weigand had communicated the result of his profound researches into the secret springs of life. In a manner, he had made Ahmed his natural successor, a pupil favoured above all others, and one who in turn must hand on the torch of knowledge, when his master had grown too feeble to hold it longer aloft. What, then, if for once that pupil had endeavoured to hoodwink him?

Were there not circumstances which accounted for this mystification, if indeed they did not justify it? The temptation to save this wretched woman from paying the penalty of her crime might well have proved irresistible to the man who had confessed that he admired her. Of course, the Professor had seen through the attempted deception, since had he not years ago earned the reputation of being one of the keenest observers in Europe without making his proofs; and his perceptive powers had gained rather than lost in acuteness with the passage of time. He had therefore, without the least difficulty, discovered the very simple artifice by means of which his pupil had striven to throw sand in the eyes of justice.

To begin with, it was Ahmed, and no other, who had prompted the woman to assume an attitude of indifference at her trial. And it was Ahmed who had thrown her into a trance that day in order that she might not

be surprised into some rational utterance, or the expression of a reasoning interest. He must have been desperate to use such an expedient, and would without doubt have left the woman to her own devices had she been under observation by any ordinary doctor. The Professor could not, therefore, help feeling flattered at the implied compliment, and he could not bring himself to be really angry with Ahmed for practising a trick on him which had proved so transparent. Moreover, when all was said, its net result had been to show indirectly that Marie Schüler was not out of her mind, since persons who are really mad are seldom susceptible to suggestion; for if they were it would be possible to cure various mental disorders by this means, which is hardly ever the case. Still the fact that his pupil was capable of such an underhand scheme would have considerably shaken the Professor's confidence, if what he had seen in the sick-room later had not tended to re-establish it. There Ahmed had exhibited the true zeal of the physician; his heat even had been rather to his credit than otherwise, and it had sprung from an impulse which no man could simulate. He might be relied on then to do everything in his power for any one entrusted to his care, never relaxing his vigilance until all the resources of science had been exhausted. And if his conduct had fallen below the standard of professional honour that day, it had not been through any want of sympathy with suffering humanity, but through a too ardent desire to save a fellow-creature from an ignominious death.

For these reasons Weigand determined to say nothing to his assistant about the active part he had taken in

helping Marie Schüler to maintain her pose of insanity. It was not a matter he could speak of, unless he meant to censure the young man severely; and if he continued to leave him in charge at Wilhelmsbrunn such a course would be extremely detrimental to the interests of the patient.

Being no longer in a state of hesitation, the next time he reached his patient's door he entered the room. He was relieved to find Countess Lichtenthal much quieter than when he had seen her last. She had ceased to turn restlessly from side to side, and was lying almost still, moving her hands at intervals in a graceful manner, whilst she repeated a string of fragments taken at random from the various pieces in which she had played, her gestures, however, bearing no sort of relation to her words.

Ahmed, who had been seated alone in the semi-darkened room, had risen on Weigand's entrance and had turned back a screen by the bedside so that the light of a lamp behind it might fall upon the patient. For some minutes the Professor listened attentively to the disconnected sentences that the Countess continued to pour forth without taking the faintest notice of his presence. He then motioned to his assistant to replace the screen, and withdrew to the fireplace, at the farther end of the room. When this had been done, and the water-proof sheet under the ice-packing readjusted, Ahmed joined him there.

"I see," said Weigand, "that you have already dispensed with the services of the nurses."

"Yes," replied Ahmed, who kept his eyes fixed on the bed opposite, white paying the strictest attention to

every word the Professor uttered. "I can watch the case better, now that I have not got to watch them also; besides, I was afraid that the sight of them might have re-acted on the patient from an association of ideas.

"Possibly it might," said Weigand, "and of course your task will be to banish this notion from her mind."

"Yes; I rely on Nurse Elsa to help me in that."

"When do you expect Fräulein Hartvig?"

"About four o'clock to-morrow morning. She will come by the same train we did the other night."

"You have managed to have the express stopped at Sachsenroda? Admirable! But you are sure you will not require a second nurse?"

"Quite, thank you. I can get any extra assistance I want from the ordinary attendants of the Countess, who are most anxious to do all that is possible for their mistress."

"Ah, I don't wonder at that, Ahmed; she must have been a fascinating woman, and from everything I hear much beloved. I have seen a portrait of Countess Lichtenthal to-night, and I was greatly impressed by her nobility of outlook. Yet, at the same time, I noticed a curious resemblance in her features to those of some one else, some one you know."

"Indeed," said the young man, with a look of surprise. "There are so few of your countrywomen known to me, and I cannot say that I have seen a likeness in our patient to any of them."

"Not to the woman I visited at Zwirnau?"

Ahmed again looked surprised, but, after a moment's pause, appearing to recognise a likeness between the

two women for the first time, he said, "Yes, perhaps there is some vague resemblance."

"Much more than that," the Professor replied; "an absolute identity of form and colour in every feature; it is only their expression that differs, and even that would be similar but for a furtive smile at the corner of Marie Schüler's mouth."

"Ah!" exclaimed Ahmed, with a sigh of genuine distress, "what a terrible difference in their lives!"

"Yes, indeed!" said Weigand, in a tone of compassion. "There was that one tell-tale trace of weakness in the woman's character from the beginning, and all the rest may have followed as a matter of course. I am ready to believe that this wretched creature has been, in a way, the victim of circumstances; but I am unable to accept your view, Ahmed, that she is not to be held responsible."

"I am sorry," said Ahmed, with an accent of resignation.

"So am I, my son. I regret the existence of a law that avenges one murder by another. Nevertheless, I could not allow my abhorrence of bloodshed to prejudice me in this woman's favour. And in my opinion she is sane, except in the sense that all criminals are mad."

Knowing that these words destroyed any hope which he might have still entertained that his illegitimate efforts on the prisoner's behalf had proved successful, Weigand endeavoured to console him for their failure with a warm pressure of the hand, accompanied by a friendly glance which was meant to assure the young man that he had not forfeited the personal regard of his chief.

XI

AHMED was in despair at the failure of his new attempt to save Mariska's life. As he watched by the bedside of Countess Lichtenthal through the still hours of the morning, it required a conscious effort on his part to remember that he was not looking at the condemned woman. The more familiar he became with Countess Lichtenthal's features the more like they appeared to those of Marie. No wonder, then, that the Professor had observed it directly he saw her portrait; and probably he would have done so even without that aid, since nothing seemed ever to escape his notice. This was a further reason why Ahmed had not wished that Weigand should visit Marie; for he had wanted, if possible, to keep the knowledge of her likeness to the Countess to himself. It was something he would far rather no one else had known; and his immediate fear was that Weigand might have mentioned the likeness to the Grand Duke. Whether this had been the case or not, he would find out at the earliest opportunity, since if it were already known to the husband it must be made use of while its influence was fresh in his mind. For, from the moment when he first saw the Countess, a scheme had unconsciously been forming itself in Ahmed's brain to be adopted only when all others had proved unsuccessful. It was on the principle of an exchange, the life of one woman against the beauty of

another. But what had happened within the last twenty-four hours had not only brought this scheme into the region of active thought, but driven Ahmed to consider the means by which it could eventually be effected. For this purpose he had been reading, all night, in a corner screened off from the bed.

The work that he had been thus absorbed in, when not attending to his patient, was a treatise on plastic surgery which had recently been sent to him by the writer, Dr. Osip Petrakoff, Professor of Morphology at the University of St. Petersburg. It contained an account of several new experiments, conceived on more daring lines than any previously carried out, even at Leipzig. Many of them, however, had failed, owing to the impossibility of keeping the subjects sufficiently long in a state of complete anæsthesia. And in the letter which had accompanied the book Dr. Petrakoff recommended his former pupil to see whether he could obtain more successful results with the wonderful drug he was reported to have discovered. Ahmed had found this letter, which was of considerable length, between two of the pages, and, though it did not bear upon the operation he had in view, had allowed it to divert him from the treatise itself. For the third or fourth time he read Dr. Petrakoff's statement of how, during the past year, positive results had been obtained in a series of attempts to locate certain moral functions of the brain. This having always been Ahmed's favourite subject of research, his eyes glistened and his fingers shook with nervous excitement as he once more glanced rapidly through his Russian colleague's letter, the contents of which he already knew almost by heart.

"There are unfortunately some things," wrote the St. Petersburg professor, "which it is not at present advisable to publish, and among these must be reckoned an operation that a friend of mine lately made upon the brain of a human being in the neighbourhood of this city. To explain why is unimportant; but, in order to save a man's life, it was found necessary to remove those portions of his brain in which memory is seated. You will remember that we have often discussed the possibility of such an operation, and I am aware that you have yourself conducted experiments of an analogous character on anthropoid apes with apparent success. But this is the first instance that has come under my notice in which it has been performed upon a member of our own species. The diagrams which I have copied overleaf from those supplied to me by my friend will show you exactly how the thing was done; and, though I dare not predict quite so successful an issue to every similar operation, I can assure you that in this particular case the desired result was achieved without the infliction of any further injury upon the subject."

For a long while the young man gazed at two delicate pen-and-ink sketches that occupied a whole side of the thin vellum-like paper, becoming each moment more and more engrossed in the train of ideas they called up. "Some one has been released from the Schlüsselburg by administrative order," he thought; "some one who knew a state secret. It was not convenient to the authorities that he should die there, and still less convenient that he should carry his knowledge into the outside world." Ahmed put the neatly written sheets

of manuscript back into the book with a sigh, which was eloquent of regret. He fully realised that the opportunity for carrying out any such conclusive investigations could occur only in Russia, and he was unable to speculate on the identity of Dr. Petrakoff's mysterious friend without feeling an acute pang of envy. But this unworthy emotion soon disappeared when he had again turned his attention to the St. Petersburg professor's published work. It was the somewhat novel method of repairing tissues described in this volume which had originally inspired Ahmed to make the proposal that had so horrified Dr. Engelbrecht. And he was even more certain now that it was the only hopeful method of treating the Countess Lichtenthal's case. One point, of course, remained still unsolved, as to what the action of the new anæsthetic would be on a human being. That must be satisfactorily settled before anything else was done; but Ahmed smiled when he reflected how easy it was to answer this question. And what matter if the drug proved unsafe, or even fatal? There, at least, would be an end of doubt! Having decided that its discoverer was to be the first person to test its properties, his mind grew calmer, and the hope which Weigand had banished gradually began to return.

Towards daybreak a slender figure in a dark dress glided in at the door so gently that another would not have heard it open; but the young man turned his head in that direction at once, and rising quickly from his seat, went to meet Elsa, with both hands outstretched. When she placed her hands in his he felt that they had

grown numb, and, remembering how cold it was outside, led her over to the fire. Then as she thawed her frozen fingers in front of the blazing logs piled high on the wide open hearth, he looked at her in silence. Yet even if it had been possible for him to speak he could have told her nothing more. Elsa knew he was pleased to see her; not merely because she could be a useful assistant, but because he liked to have her near him. She had come straight up in her travelling cloak, and as he took it from her he saw that it was coated with a thin glaze of ice. The cold must have been intense he knew. Still he was glad that Elsa had come in spite of it; and as she again bent forward to catch the warmth of the friendly flames, she seemed to him more than ever before the embodiment of all that a man's true companion should be. Immediately after warming herself, Elsa had gone over to the bed and leant across it to smooth out the clothes which a restless movement of the patient had just disturbed. She then stood for some minutes looking intently at the Countess, who slowly turned her head from one side to the other in her feverish troubled sleep. However, at last Ahmed beckoned to her, and, by walking towards the door, signified that it was high time she retired to rest herself. And although she told him in a whisper that she had slept enough already in the train, he insisted that she must at least lie down until he sent for her. Therefore, as submission to the doctor's will becomes second nature to a good nurse, she obeyed.

"What a pity!" she said softly, glancing back at the patient. "But what a triumph for you, Ahmed, if you can prevent the worst!"

When, a few hours later, Elsa relieved the young man from his long watch, he was almost dropping with fatigue, and no sooner had he flung off the things he had been wearing since the morning of the previous day, than he sank into a deep, dreamless slumber. Nor did he wake from this until the winter sun was already low on the horizon. Nevertheless he did not waste much time either in dressing or at breakfast, for half-an-hour afterwards he looked in at the sick-room, which the nurse had made meanwhile a picture of neatness. Then, with a smile of gratitude to Elsa, he went on his way to see the Grand Duke, and being informed that his Royal Highness had gone for a walk in the park, at once hurried off to find him there. He had little difficulty in this, as the footprints of the Grand Duke and his adjutant, accompanied by those of a large dog, were plainly visible on the crisp, newly fallen snow outside. Ahmed had not gone far when he came in sight of the two men standing by the edge of a plantation on some rising ground that commanded a view of the lake. When he got nearer he saw that the younger of them, who was in an undress cavalry uniform, stared wistfully at the fast moving skaters on the level ice, while the elder, in a grey-green hunter's jacket, tight breeches, and high boots, bent his eyes upon the ground, oblivious of the crowd before him. But, regardless of etiquette, Ahmed walked straight towards him, through it should have been apparent to any one that the Grand Duke was lost in meditation. As he did so, his quick ear caught the dull thuds of an animal's feet approaching rapidly from one side, and a moment later he saw a big, slate-coloured boarhound,

Sigurd, clear the corner of the plantation. With perfect confidence that the recognition would soon become mutual, Ahmed stood still while it rushed headlong at him. The thick bristles on its neck were raised, and it was uttering a low angry growl as it advanced, which must have been heard by his Royal Highness, for he looked up at once, but before he had recovered his presence of mind sufficiently to call the dog by name it had leapt upon the defenceless doctor. However, to the Grand Duke's infinite relief, though the boarhound had placed its massive paws on his shoulders and brought its open jaws within an inch of his throat, it made no attempt to seize him. In less than a second it was on all fours once more, rubbing its great head against his leg and allowing him to grasp the stout leather thong attached to its brass-studded collar. It was evident that the equerry had relaxed his hold of this lead in his excitement at watching the skaters.

"Merciful powers, Bredowshausen!" exclaimed the Grand Duke to the conscience-stricken captain, "you have given me a mortal fright. How came you to let Sigurd get loose?"

"I can't tell, sir," replied Bredowshausen, saluting "except, perhaps, because I did not feel the strap through the cold."

"Possibly," said the Grand Duke; "but I cannot trust you with him again."

Then, moving a few steps forward, he asked, in an eager tone of voice, if Ahmed were the bearer of ill news, and when the doctor had replied that his patient's condition was unchanged, he said: "Thank Heaven for

that, and thank Heaven that you were not hurt, my friend."

"There was no danger of it, your Royal Highness," said Ahmed, with a light laugh, twisting the dog's pricked ear in his fingers, and then running them through the hair at the back of its neck.

"Oh, there was though," said the Grand Duke; "Sigurd is gentle enough with those he knows, especially with my wife, who has always made a pet of him, but he is very savage to strangers! I am at a loss to know how you made friends with him."

"I am fond of dogs."

"Yes; only Sigurd has never taken to any one like this before."

"Because no one else understood him!" Ahmed answered. "But I think I do. With your Royal Highness's permission, I would show you how well."

"I have no objection," said the Grand Duke, who was still several yards away from the doctor. "Indeed, after what I have seen already of your skill in dog taming, I am even curious."

"Well, sir," said Ahmed, dropping the leather lead, and drawing his fingers gently downwards behind the dog's ear, "will you please call him to you now?"

"Sigurd!" the Grand Duke called, in a low affectionate tone. Then, after a slight pause, he repeated the dog's name with an accent of command; but again Sigurd paid no attention to him, though on each occasion he looked up inquiringly at the doctor.

"Now once more, if you please, sir."

This time his Royal Highness called the hound to him in the indifferent manner of one who did not

expect it to obey; but, to his surprise, after a rapid side glance at Ahmed, it came bounding towards him.

"Wonderful," he exclaimed, "perfectly wonderful!"

"Yes," echoed his companion, "wonderful! Worthy of a circus."

Bredowshausen had a vague idea that what the doctor had done had not been accomplished without some previous preparation. But his remark procured a stern look of reproach from the Grand Duke. When, therefore, Ahmed begged him for a private audience, he was the more ready to dismiss his equerry. "There are a few minutes of light left, captain," he said, with a wave of his hand, "go and disport yourself on the ice."

"At your order, sir," said Bredowshausen. Then after standing bolt upright for one second, he darted off down-hill to the lake, where before long he was skating with a pretty English miss from the pension at Sachsenroda.

"You wish to re-open the matter that was decided yesterday?" asked the Grand Duke, looking hard at Ahmed under his shaggy, iron-grey eyebrows.

"Yes!"

"To what end?"

"Because I want to make use of this woman in order to preserve my patient from disfigurement."

"What do you mean? Speak plainly," said the Grand Duke in a hoarse tone.

"Your Royal Highness knows that there is a similarity between Countess Lichtenthal and the condemned woman — in age," said Ahmed, with a questioning glance at the Grand Duke.

"Yes, I see she is about the same age as my wife; but what of that?"

"There is a general resemblance in colouring. For Marie Schüler is also a blonde; her skin, too, is of the same texture as the Countess's. And physically, at least, she is free from any kind of taint."

"Well?"

"The best way to save Countess Lichtenthal's appearance would be by transplanting a portion of healthy skin to her throat from that of a living subject. And I do not know where we are to find another so suitable for this purpose as the woman at Zwirnau. Besides, it would be quite impossible in the time to make sure that any one, who was willing to submit to the operation, possessed no inherited disease, — even if any young woman in full health would consent to the utter destruction of her good looks, which it involves. But with Marie Schüler the case is different. She would readily sacrifice her beauty to save her life."

"Ah, I see what you mean now," said the Grand Duke, thoughtfully; "you wish me to drive a bargain with the murderess for the sake of my wife. I am to remit the death penalty and order her to be imprisoned at my pleasure. And then she is to be informed by you what my pleasure is."

"She would be glad to do so much out of gratitude, and if later on she were set at liberty."

"Of course," said the Grand Duke, "that would be part of the arrangement. First I am to declare that the woman is mad, and then, in a little while, I am to discover that I was mistaken. You have thought it all

out, my friend. But," he added gravely, "it is too late!"

They were both silent for some time. His Royal Highness at length turned again to Ahmed, and placing his hand on the doctor's arm, said, in a low earnest voice, "My friend, had you broached this scheme the other day I might have been tempted to concur in it for the sake of one who is very dear to me. And I thank Heaven you did not; since, had I yielded, I could never have known another moment's peace. Had it been possible, with a clear conscience, I would have pardoned this woman; for, had your view been endorsed by Professor Weigand, I would not have listened to those who told me that it was nevertheless expedient she should die. But to set the law aside for one's own benefit is another matter, a thing which no man of honour in a position of final responsibility could ever do. No doubt, you have lost sight of everything except the safety of your patient; and I do not care to think any the worse of you for that. Still, I am glad that I was saved from this temptation. The paper you saw in my cabinet is now in the hands of the Minister of Justice, signed; and I could not demand its return, even if I would."

After a long pause, Ahmed asked, with a gesture of resignation, "When will the sentence be carried out?"

"In two or three weeks; the actual date is fixed by the Governor of the prison."

"The execution takes place privately?"

"Yes!"

"And afterwards, what is done with the body?"

"Burned, I believe!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the young man, who then checked himself, as though he had been about to say something else but had thought it inadvisable.

"You have something in your mind, doctor," said the Grand Duke, with an accent of inquiry.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I have spoken of the best way to repair the injury the Countess has sustained, but there is another method that might answer almost as well."

"Let me hear about this method."

"That I should take what I require from the body of this woman immediately after death."

"Would it be possible?"

"Under certain conditions, yes."

"Well?"

"If I were allowed beforehand to administer a drug we have lately employed in the laboratory with success, that prevents the tissues from passing into the death-rigour for a prolonged period."

"Has it no other effect?"

"It would also render the subject insensible to pain."

"The aim of the law is not to inflict torture," said the Grand Duke, slowly, as though considering the question in all its bearings. "But we have not yet arrived at putting the condemned to a painless death."

"Still, as a matter of fact," replied Ahmed, "many are practically unconscious during their last hours, and I believe it is not unusual for a narcotic to be given in cases of extreme nervous susceptibility."

"Perhaps, and I have no personal objection to that part of your proposal; but there are many features in it

I do not like. To take one. Would the operation you suggest have the approval of Dr. Weigand?"

"He has approved of it already."

"You have discussed the matter then?"

"Yes, at our first consultation here."

"And he thought it feasible?"

"Absolutely. More than that, he considered it imperative, and since the Countess discovered the character of her injuries it has become still more urgent. Then it was only her reason for which we feared, now it is her life also."

"Yes," said the Grand Duke, "I guessed from the Professor's tone last night that she was in danger. Tell me, Dr. Ahmed, when am I to be allowed to see her again?"

"To-morrow," he replied, "if we can keep her fairly quiet in the meantime. But only then for a little while, and you must be prepared to find that the Countess does not recognise you."

"If I agreed to your carrying out this operation it would necessitate her being taken away?"

"Yes."

"To that place?"

"Yes."

"I could never reconcile myself to it."

"Your Royal Highness may think differently to-morrow."

"After I have seen my wife?"

The doctor bent his head in assent, and another long silence fell upon both men, who had already turned their footsteps mechanically towards the palace. After a while, however, the Grand Duke raised his eyes from

the ground, at which he had been staring vacantly, and asked his companion how he intended to do the thing without its being known by everybody. That, Ahmed explained, was a question he could not answer offhand. It would be difficult, no doubt, and yet he fancied he could arrange it. Of course, it was essential that it should remain a profound secret between them; no one even in the palace would be told more than was absolutely necessary. His Royal Highness would perceive, when he had seen the patient's distressed condition, that something must be done to remove the cause as quickly as possible; and he would judge for himself whether this were a time at which any sentimental considerations should be taken into account. As to the place, beyond its melancholy associations, it could not be better adapted to the purpose. The infirmary at Zwirnau was constructed on modern lines, and from a hygienic point of view was much safer than Wilhelmsbrunn itself. All that the people in the palace need know was that Countess Lichtenthal had been removed for special treatment to a private hospital; but where this was situated they must not be told. Dr. Weigand, on the other hand, must know all about it, as he would probably like to carry out the actual operation himself; but then, of course, he could be depended upon never to breathe a word to any one.

"To be sure," said the Grand Duke, half to himself, "if the Professor advised it, I suppose I cannot withhold my consent."

They had nearly reached the entrance of the palace by this time, so having caught up Sigurd's leash, his Royal Highness beckoned to a man in the same sort of

forester's uniform that he wore himself and gave the great Dane into his charge. Whereupon the hound made a desperate attempt to regain his liberty, and almost succeeded in pulling his keeper back towards Ahmed, from whom he was obviously unwilling to be parted. It seemed, indeed, that the man would not be able to move him from the spot, but after the doctor had come near to Sigurd and had stroked his head gently two or three times he allowed himself to be led away without any further resistance.

"You have a marvellous influence over that beast, doctor," said the Grand Duke, in a tone of sincere admiration. "Have you ever tried your power with other animals?"

"I have seldom had occasion," replied Ahmed, smiling. "I find all animals friendly; except when one is hurting them, and then they become like men."

"Ah," said the Grand Duke, with a gruff laugh. "You have not much faith in the friendliness of your fellowmen."

"I had no great reason to at home, sir," Ahmed said bitterly; "my brother twice did his best to kill me, and if I went back he would try for the third time, and succeed, perhaps; unless —" There he stopped short, as though he had suddenly remembered that his feelings could be of no interest to any one else; but added in a lighter tone, "I have found good friends in this country though."

"I am glad to hear it, doctor," said the Grand Duke, kindly; then, with a courteous inclination of the head, he took leave of the young man, and walked slowly off up the stone steps with his eyes cast down, his body

bent slightly forward, and his hands clasped behind his back.

Ahmed watched the stooping figure until it was out of sight, with an expression of pity in his half-closed eyes; and then strolled away down the path that had been swept in front of the palace. He felt that he could think more clearly in the open air; and he had much that was of importance to think about. The Grand Duke would fall in with his new plan; that was certain, as certain as that he had rejected the old one. The young man passed up and down before the long façade several times in the dusk, working out the details of his scheme. And as the darkness gathered round him the light within also seemed to fail; his brain had grown cold, and he could no longer see his way through the windings of the difficult road on which he was about to start. Up to a certain point it ran straight forward; but then it branched in two directions, each leading to a widely different goal. "Which would he take?" he asked himself. But the reply that slowly rose up out of his inner consciousness proved as enigmatic as that of an oracle. "It will be the one that you meant to take from the first."

This answer to his unspoken question, which seemed to have been uttered by some one standing close behind him, caused Ahmed to look round in a guilty way, to see if he were still alone; for so startling a revelation was it that he could scarcely persuade himself that the actual words had not been whispered in his ear. Then he turned his steps towards the entrance of the palace, and was soon in his own comfortable room once more. He drew a chair towards the glowing stove, and took

from his pocket a small leather-bound diary, with various printed memoranda; among others a record of the phases of the moon. Ahmed opened it at the page on which these particulars appeared, and found that the moon would be nearly at the full in two or three days. Having ascertained this fact, he turned over another leaf and looked through the notes which he had made on the blank pages that followed the calendar for the year. One of them he evidently regarded as being of the utmost importance; for, when he had confirmed his recollection of the date, he closed the book with a sigh of relief. The entry in question showed that the approaching Physiological Congress would meet at Vienna in a fortnight's time and would sit for over a week.

XII

NEXT day, when Elsa resumed her duties in the morning, the doctor did not at once retire to rest, but remained to receive the Grand Duke. The Countess was still slightly delirious, though her temperature had fallen considerably. But when her husband came into the room she took no notice of him, and continued to mutter to herself in the same low monotone as before. Elsa rose from the chair at the bedside, and the Grand Duke took her place. For the moment he was too distressed to speak to his wife; however, in a little while he found the courage to inquire how she felt.

"Very well," replied the Countess, without looking at him.

"Really well, Amy?" he asked in despair, his voice trembling with emotion.

"No," she answered quickly, "not well at all; I never shall be again. Don't let Hans see me, now that I am hideous; I want him to think of me as I was."

The Grand Duke put his hands before his face to hide the tears that he could not hold back any longer. She did not know him, and she had spoken of herself as though she were a dying woman, as though she had no wish to live now that her beauty was gone. The doctor was right, then, in thinking it would be worth while to risk much in order to restore that which she

valued above all else. Not that her being disfigured would have made the smallest difference to his love; but he could not convince her of the fact. In faltering tones he tried to tell her that it did not matter how she looked. She would always be the same to him, because he saw the beauty of her mind. If only she were content with his love, and with the love of all who knew the goodness of her heart, nothing would be changed. Yet, even as he spoke the words, he felt that they failed to carry his meaning, and seemed hollow compared with the depth of sincere devotion that prompted them. Perhaps this was only because the woman to whom they were spoken did not listen to them, but grew more restless every moment, and, whenever he paused to see if they had awakened any responsive echo in her mind, muttered a single sentence to herself, over and over again —

"Farewell! Now I have nothing more on earth."

At first he could not place the phrase, which sounded strangely familiar, but after a while he recognised it; and then, each time she repeated the sentence, it fell like a death-knell upon his ear. It was the last line of her favourite part, and all the mournful ideas associated with the words crowded upon him, so that again his eyes were filled with tears.

Both the nurse and the doctor had turned their heads away, and, but for the necessity of guarding against a sudden impulse on the part of the patient to get up, they would have retired from the room. As soon, however, as the Grand Duke had mastered his emotion he rose slowly and came towards the foot of the bed.

"You are the new nurse, then," he said to Elsa, who was standing there. "And your name is ——?"

"Elsa, your Royal Highness," she replied, dropping him a curtsey.

"Elsa," he repeated. "Nurse Elsa; it's a pretty name, and you —" He had looked at her pale face with a certain curiosity, as though he were anxious to find out what sort of person this was to whom the care of his beloved had been entrusted, and, seeing a trace of moisture in her large expressive eyes, he knew that she must be sympathetic; therefore, since she had been vouched for by the Professor himself as a good nurse, he felt he might place absolute confidence in her. The Grand Duke liked Elsa's fine frank outlook, and he noted the intelligence in her eyes, and self-reliance in the carriage of her head. His feeling of satisfaction showed itself in the grave smile of approval with which he eventually turned away from her.

"I think we are in safe hands now, doctor," said the Grand Duke, as he moved towards the door and beckoned to Ahmed to follow him; then, after bowing to Elsa, he went out, leaving her profoundly impressed by the natural dignity of his manner. Accustomed to the studied abruptness of the lesser lights of medicine, there was a peculiar fascination to the nurse in this graceful courtesy. In her own romantic way she could not help wondering if Ahmed would ever rule over his people, and be a great captain like this simple old soldier-prince. The Grand Duke led Ahmed down the long corridor and through the vast picture-gallery and several smaller rooms thronged with dignitaries in official uniform awaiting audience, to his private

cabinet. As the double doors were about to be closed behind them he made a sign to the chief marshal of the Court that no one else would be received that morning. And the moment they were alone he sank into an armchair, in an attitude of intense dejection, his face buried in his hands, oblivious, for the time being, of his companion. At last he raised his head and pulling himself together with an effort, rose stiffly to his feet.

"You will excuse the forgetfulness of an old man, my friend," he said, his voice still trembling slightly. "But sorrow is always selfish, and mine to-day has been very great. So great that I have almost despaired of ever knowing gladness again. Ah, if you could give her back to me as she was a few days ago there is no torture of suspense I would not endure without complaint. For I see now that unless this happens she will not live. Nothing else will comfort her, poor child! And it is hardly strange; she has been so praised for her beauty. You, who have only seen her since this accident, can form no idea of what she looked like before. But if you will come with me, Dr. Ahmed, I will show you a portrait in which the artist has caught her expression to the life." The Grand Duke opened the door into the next room and motioned Ahmed to go in. "There," he said, pointing to the picture that had so struck Weigand, "that is a good likeness of my wife." Ahmed moved slowly back and soon reached a spot where the cold wintry light brought every feature of the portrait into focus. But when he had done this he was quite unable to suppress an ejaculation of admiration and astonishment.

"Yes," said the Grand Duke, interpreting Ahmed's inarticulate exclamation. "It is very fine. But it does not flatter her in the least. That is exactly how she appeared as Maria Stuart."

"Countess Lichtenthal is painted in fancy dress, then?" asked Ahmed, gradually taking in all the details of the unfamiliar costume.

"She is represented in her favourite character," said her husband. "My wife was not, perhaps, one of our greatest actresses; but she was undoubtedly a most beautiful woman, and for that reason specially suited to the part of this ill-fated queen. I wish you could have seen her in it."

"So do I," Ahmed replied, in a tone full of meaning. And for some time he gazed at the picture, lost in thought, utterly forgetting the presence of the Grand Duke. He was not, however, thinking of the likeness it bore to the sitter; but of the still closer likeness that must once have existed between Countess Lichtenthal herself and the condemned woman. For he now saw that there was an even greater similarity between their features than he had supposed possible, and that the minute shades of difference that did occur could easily be eliminated. They both represented a perfect but not uncommon type of beauty; only to be met with, however, in Austria, and then generally among women of mixed nationality. Ahmed therefore felt sure, after he had studied her face for a little while, that Countess Lichtenthal must be of the same half-Sclav, half-Magyar race from which Marie Schüler had sprung. Observing that the young man was deep in the contemplation of his wife's portrait the Grand Duke had

not interrupted him; but, when Ahmed at last turned from the picture, he said, as they walked back together towards the other room —

"I will write to Professor Weigand immediately, and if he is agreed you shall have a free hand, Dr. Ahmed."

The young man silently bowed in acknowledgment of these welcome words; and at once retired from the royal presence with the customary formal compliments. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, he moved rapidly through the antechambers with his habitual long cat-like stride, his head thrown back, and nothing in his face to indicate to any one of the crowd of courtiers, who glanced curiously at him as he passed, that he had carried his point in a matter of life and death. Still when he reached his own room, his set features relapsed into a thin smile; it was not, however, a smile of triumph, but rather that faint reflection of inward pleasure to be seen in the face of one who is conducting an intricate experiment to a successful issue. And in spite of his having been up for twenty hours, during which his brain had been busily occupied, he did not go to bed at once; but first sat down to make some fresh entries in his book. Among these there was one which seemed strangely out of keeping with the rest; it ran thus, "Maria Stuart, black velvet."

Elsa kept watch till nearly twelve that night, before the doctor came to take her place in the sick-room. When Ahmed returned, the Countess was a trifle restless, though not more so than he had expected her to be. Elsa lingered for a few minutes after he came, in order to give him the chance to say a word or two to

her. Speaking softly he told her she must try to sleep till late in the morning, and spend as many hours as possible in the open air each day. He also said that she was not to come back again before six o'clock in the evening, as he intended to remain on duty till then, and wished her to take the next eighteen hours straight off. For answer, Elsa clasped his hand warmly and looked him fondly in the eyes. With his assurance that she would carry out his instructions to the letter, she was about to leave the room, when Ahmed asked her in a casual tone, if she knew who wrote the stage play in which Maria Stuart appeared. Elsa was obliged to admit that she did not; nor did she remember ever to have read it.

"You see I have had so little time for reading anything except medical books," she said.

"Exactly my case," replied Ahmed, with an accent of regret. "I've always thought it a waste of time to read plays, or see them acted, either; but it is not so always."

Elsa crossed noiselessly over to the door, looking back at him with a smile of farewell as she went out of the room; and no sooner was she gone than Ahmed settled himself in his corner behind the screen. He had just placed a portfolio containing a large-scale map of the district on the table before him, when his attention was suddenly arrested by something the Countess was muttering to herself. A name had fallen from her lips, and in an instant he was listening breathlessly, so that not a word of what followed should escape him.

"Maria Stuart is in the play of that name by Schiller.

Everybody knows that!" she said in a low voice, but quite distinctly enough to reach the young man's ear; and she then broke off into a stream of incoherent sounds that conveyed no meaning even to him.

"I did not know it," said Ahmed to himself, "and I might have remained in ignorance of the fact for some time yet, if you had not heard me ask the question, Countess Lichtenthal. Evidently that lady's name is always in your mind. I wonder if you have ever for a moment thought that you were a reincarnation of her? Such things have been, and are not unlikely to happen again, when the living brood over-long upon some fancied resemblance to the dead. Well, I shall see how things stand better after I have read the play. By Schiller?" he added, speaking the words aloud. "One of your great poets, I believe! Thank you, Countess." And leaning forward, with the grim suggestion of a bow to his patient, he wrote the author's name in his pocket-book. He then began again closely to study the map, which he had borrowed from one of the Grand Duke's adjutants. Sheet by sheet he pieced together the section he required, in order to trace out the course of the main roads between Wilhelmsbrunn and Zwirnau. When he had calculated out all the intermediate distances, Ahmed carefully compared the varying elevations and came to the conclusion that the easiest road measured about forty-four kilometres. Therefore, unless a heavy fall of snow occurred meanwhile, the journey from the palace to Zwirnau Castle might be made in three hours, and, allowing for a halt of half-an-hour midway, the moon would be well up for the whole time during the next

two or three nights. Two things were certain: firstly, the Countess must be conveyed there by road; and, secondly, if her destination was to be concealed, she must be removed under cover of night. The question was, Could this be done with safety? But, on reflection, he thought that, without doubt, it could, provided adequate precautions were taken.

Early next morning one of the attendants brought Ahmed a note from the Grand Duke, asking how his wife was and when he might see her. To this the doctor replied that Countess Lichtenthal was somewhat stronger, and, for the time being, free from delirium, but that it was advisable to keep the Countess perfectly quiet, and that his Royal Highness must decide whether he would run the risk of a distressing outbreak on her part, which, in view of what had already happened, seemed inevitable, if her thoughts were again drawn to the subject of her injuries. Before long he received a second note from the Grand Duke, expressing his willingness to wait until the danger of any such untoward occurrence had passed, and enclosing a letter from Professor Weigand. For a time Ahmed could scarcely distinguish the words of his chief's letter, his excitement being so violent that a tremor ran through his whole body. Soon, however, he conquered this momentary weakness and proceeded to read the letter with the utmost attention; and, on finding that the Professor approved of his proposal, he could not suppress a low cry of exultation. Towards the end of his letter the Professor informed the Grand Duke that it was absolutely impossible for him to

perform the operation, since, at the time when it would be necessary to operate, he must be in Vienna, but that his Royal Highness might place entire confidence in Dr. Ahmed, to whom he contemplated surrendering the active part of his practice, and whose manual dexterity could not be surpassed. As the young man read these words he smiled pleasantly; gratified by so high a compliment, and rejoicing also in the success of this first step in his well-thought-out plan.

That evening, Ahmed was again closeted with the Grand Duke for a considerable time. And when he took leave of his Royal Highness he carried with him, in addition to a roll of bank-notes, an autographed letter of the Grand Duke's to Freiherr von Baltzan, and an order to the Master of Horse bidding him put the stable at Dr. Ahmed's disposition. Having obtained a written authority from this high official, he went straight to the stable and selected the pair of horses best suited for his purpose. Ahmed told the head groom to have them fed for a long journey and ready saddled in the courtyard at midnight. He then hurried away to his own room, so that he might snatch a few hours' rest before it was necessary to take the road, And when, at the time appointed, he walked quietly up to the stable gate, he appeared quite as fresh as if he had slept for a whole night. The groom, who stood waiting under the archway holding the heads of the horses, was astonished to hear that Ahmed did not require him to ride either of them. His surprise increased when he was told to fetch a halter and an extra piece of rope. But he could not help admiring the workman-like style in which the doctor, after slipping

off the bridle, put the halter on one of the horses and then deftly attached it to the rope that he had first made fast to the military saddle on the other. Ahmed, who was wearing high cannon boots, stamped his feet to find out whether the snow had clung to them. He next looked at the horses' shoes, and, having made sure that they were sufficiently rough, he mounted the bridled horse, and told the man to remove the saddle from the other. While this was being done he looked up at the moon and noted its position with regard to the stars; he then touched the horse he was riding lightly with his heel, so that it started off over the firm crisp snow, the led horse trotting placidly by its side.

"In truth the Herr doctor had no need of me," thought the groom, as he watched them disappear down the long avenue. "One can see that he has served with the cavalry, and, it would seem, with those singing devils of Cossacks."

He guessed rightly, for the doctor had learned that part of horsemanship he did not know by intuition from these obliging neighbours of his; and like them made nothing of riding, Cossack-fashion, a hundred versts in the day. In fact, for so short a journey as that on which he was bound that night, he would not have taken two horses unless he had had some further use for them. Jogging along the edge of the road, he rode over twenty kilometres before he made a halt. He knew by the pace he had travelled at, and the distance the moon had moved in the sky, that he could not now be far from a village which lies about half-way between Wilhelmsbrunn and Zwirnau. And when he had topped the next hill he saw, in the dip below, a cluster

of houses, that threw a long black shadow across the road. "This must be Ober-Karlsdorf," he thought, "and the least dilapidated of those buildings is the inn."

Ahmed rode slowly by these houses, scanning each in turn, and had passed nearly all of them when his sharp eyes caught the word "Herberge," painted over a door in white characters upon a black ground. Luckily it was on the moonlit side of the road or he would never have seen it. There was not a sign of life about the place, but, at length, Ahmed perceived a dim light shining in the solitary window of a vast barn-like structure, a little to one side of the house. Dismounting and leading his horse towards this window, he tapped sharply on the glass with his fingers. In a few seconds the casement flew open, and a close-cropped head was thrust out.

"What is it?" asked the stableman, in a rough sleepy voice, with an accent of suspicion, that was not without a shade of alarm. "Is the place on fire?"

"Not that I know!" replied Ahmed, laughing at his absurd look of apprehension.

"Then what do you wake one up for?" he growled.

"Because I want you to take my horse," said Ahmed.

"Oh, you have got a horse!" exclaimed the stableman, with an enormous increase of respect in his tone. "I'll be at your honour's service in a minute."

Thereupon he disappeared, taking the light with him; and, in an incredibly short space of time, he came out of the door with a lantern in his hand. When he distinguished the second horse, he cried out in amazement: "Two horses and only one rider! Anything like that I have not seen in all the days of my life."

Again Ahmed smiled at his surprise, and directed him to hold the horse he had been riding, while he himself took off the saddle. He quickly put it on the led horse, and as quickly changed the halter for the bridle; then turning to the stableman, who still stared at him open-mouthed, he said —

"Take that horse into the stable; give him a good rub down, a drink of water in half-an-hour, and a feed in the morning. Look after him well, my friend. It will be worth your while! I shall return to-morrow to see how he has been treated, and, if I find everything in order, I will leave his companion with you for a time."

After glancing into the stable to see that it was reasonably comfortable, Ahmed put a thaler into the ostler's hand, mounted the fresh horse, and rode away. The light of the moon had almost failed when he walked his horse up the steep slopes of the winding road that led up to Hohen-Zwirnau. He had approached the castle this time through the pine-woods, only striking the road by which he had come before just beneath the outer fortifications. At the point where the two roads met there stood a restaurant, greatly used in summer time, but deserted in winter by the good people of Zwirnau. On that account Ahmed feared it might be shut up. However, with some difficulty he succeeded in waking the house-boy, who, propitiated by the gift of a small coin, not only found an empty stall in the cowshed for the horse, but rolled a couch up to the big iron stove in the great bare dining-room for the doctor to rest on.

About eight o'clock, after making himself as presentable as possible, Ahmed rang at the entrance to

von Baltzan's private apartments. The soldier-servant who opened the door recognised him immediately, and ushered him into a reception room, where he was very soon joined by the genial baron, who apparently did not intend to keep any one accredited by the Grand Duke waiting a second time. He had, therefore, hurried into the room, and, having shaken hands effusively with Ahmed, insisted that he should share his morning cup of coffee. And only when the doctor had comfortably seated himself at the breakfast table did von Baltzan ask him to what he was to ascribe the pleasure of seeing him. To this question Ahmed replied by handing him the Grand Duke's letter, which the Governor, after politely demanding permission, began at once to read. It was not long, but its contents were of so cryptic a nature that he read the whole letter through twice before he looked up from it, and said, in an official tone —

"I am at your orders, doctor. Tell me exactly what you want me to do."

Thus directly challenged, Ahmed, indicating, with a wave of the hand, that he was merely making a request, explained that he wished to bring somebody to the castle on the next night but one. The person alluded to would be lodged in the prison infirmary, unseen by any one, and while there would be in the sole charge of the woman who would arrive at the same time, and would be visited by nobody but himself.

"No one will attempt to discover the identity of this person, or even to guess at it," the doctor added quietly, but in a slow, impressive way.

"I understand that perfectly," said von Baltzan, glancing again at the letter.

"In the meantime," continued Ahmed, "I am to take over the duties of Dr. Meissener, who will be given leave of absence from to-morrow evening. The condemned woman will then come under my care. This is absolutely essential, because her health is of the greatest importance to my plans. By-the-bye, Baron, have you fixed the execution?"

"On the last day possible," said the Governor, with a deep sigh; "the death-warrant was sent to me yesterday. It must be carried out within a fortnight."

"In thirteen days' time, then," said the doctor; "that will suit my purpose."

"Am I permitted to inquire what it might be?"

"Certainly! And I feel bound to tell you that I shall want your help."

"Well?"

"I must first warn you that it is rather a ghastly business, even from a medical point of view. Of course, you will not breathe a word of what I say to any one; not even to Meissener. My purpose is to use tissue taken from the body of this woman immediately after death, in order to repair certain injuries the person I told you of has sustained. It is necessary, therefore, that the prisoner should remain in good health up to the end, and that her body should be handed to me the moment the execution is over."

"But, man," cried the Governor, quite unable to repress the disgust with which this cold-blooded proposal inspired him, "how could you do such a thing? You who have known her?"

Ahmed looked at von Baltzan's horrified face, for a little while, with a not unsympathetic smile, and then said gravely, "Baron, we doctors are sometimes forced to do such things."

But the sentimental Governor, who had fallen more in love with Marie every day, wrinkling his short nose and protruding his brushed-up moustache, muttered to himself in an undertone —

"Then, thank Heaven I am not a doctor."

XIII

ADOLPH MEISSENER was obviously delighted to see his Leipzig colleague so soon again; and, undemonstrative as Ahmed was, he felt a glow of genuine pleasure at the cordial welcome which the little man extended to him. Directly they had exchanged the usual greetings, the prison doctor's joyful countenance grew serious once more. Asked what was the matter, he silently shook his head; and it became evident to Ahmed that he had something of a painful nature to communicate. At last, however, the little man overcame his hesitation and began to speak rapidly, as was always his habit. "I am glad to see you for another reason, my friend. It is on account of Marie Schüler; her condition since you were here has led me to believe that you were right about her state of mind. You are, of course, aware that she placed implicit faith in your power to save her. Well, it appears that she knew you accompanied the Professor the other day."

"How could she, unless you told her?" asked Ahmed.

"I do not know," replied the other, "except that it was not through me, nor through any one else, as far as I can ascertain. The thing is a mystery. She says that she *saw* you; that you came to her and told her to sleep; and that when she awoke you were gone."

"An hallucination," said Ahmed, calmly.

"Exactly!" Meissener answered, "and that is what

has brought me round to your opinion. I regard it as a convincing symptom of insanity."

"Have you no other evidence?"

"Nothing so conclusive. But yesterday, against my advice, Baron von Baltzan told her that there was no hope that her sentence would be commuted. He had certain religious scruples, which I naturally do not share, about leaving her in ignorance of her fate. He did no good though, for since then she has been sunk in a deeper apathy than ever; and it is as much as we can do to force her to take food. But when you have seen her yourself you will know how she is, better than I can tell you." As he said this, the little man marched off down the passage which led to the end ward. Opening the iron door with his master key, he stood aside to allow Ahmed to enter. They found Marie sitting on a low stool, with her mass of hair in the wildest disorder. She was gazing out of the window, as though wrapped in the contemplation of some far-off object. Meissener exchanged a significant glance with the infirmary attendant on duty, which was not unnoticed by Ahmed, though he said nothing. For several minutes he looked at Marie steadfastly in silence, and not until the tension had become almost unbearable to the prison doctor did he approach her, in order to touch her lightly on the arm. The contact of his fingers seemed to exert a magnetic effect upon the woman, for she started at once to her feet and faced him.

"Oh," she said, in a dull, flat, and quite strange voice, after pushing back the yellow tangle that fell before her eyes. "You are another of them — come

to look at me before it is too late? Well, you may look your fill; it is all the same to me; in a few days I shall be dead. Fancy that — dead! I, who am so full of life now. Perhaps you are a priest and have come to tell me that I should think only of another life, though you don't know that there is one a bit more than I do. But I shall soon, if I know anything at all then." She came a little nearer to him; and, when she had looked at his clothes, continued to speak in the same level tone, as though the subject was one which did not concern her personally. "No, not a priest! A doctor then? You have come to beg them for my body so that you can cut it to pieces, and discover why I am not like other women."

Ahmed was shocked to find that she did not recognise him. As far as he could judge, too, her condition was most critical, evidently bordering upon mania. This was the one contingency, which he had not foreseen, and against which he had consequently not provided. Yet he saw now that it was of all things the likeliest to happen. For the great danger of feigned insanity is that it may soon cease to be a pretence, and the attitude which he had ordered her to assume at her trial was essentially that of a mad woman. He had also forgotten the tremendous mental strain that she had been subjected to since then. Or, perhaps, he had thought that she would remain unconscious of what had taken place, owing to the suggestion he had conveyed to her. Still the effect of a suggestion, however powerful at the moment, works off in time; and it was now obvious to him that the horror of her situation had slowly dawned upon Marie; and that it

threatened to overthrow her reason, unless she could be speedily convinced that there was no such terrible fate in store for her.

All these considerations flashed through Ahmed's brain in the fraction of a second. "Matuschka," he said in a low voice, speaking in the language which was most familiar to her, "don't you know me?" She put both her hands on his shoulders and peered up into his face. Then suddenly she pushed him from her and burst into a flood of tears. Ahmed's features were contracted with pain; it was the first time he had seen this beautiful creature weep. He had always thought her coldness to be her one fault; and the fact that she was not of an emotional temperament made the present tearful demonstration all the more ominous. But, knowing that the least trace of weakness on his part would provoke a violent outburst of hysteria in Marie which might leave her a hopeless imbecile, he fought hard to preserve his own mental equilibrium. She exhibited already the worst symptoms of melancholia. If, therefore, this was not to become the confirmed habit of her mind, it was of vital importance that she should at once be made to speak calmly and naturally. Ahmed was also fully cognisant that his influence over her had sensibly diminished, if indeed it had not entirely disappeared. For this reason he did not attempt to address her with an accent of command, but spoke in the most soothing tone imaginable. "You cannot really believe that I have deserted you, my dove. For, if I had, I should not be here now; and surely you have not forgotten me. You remember what I told you, Matuschka?"

"Yes," she murmured, between her sobs.

"Ah, that is right," he said, with a smile, adding, as he clasped her hands warmly in his, "and you still trust me?"

"I don't know!"

"But you ought to. Listen now! The sun will not rise a second time before you see me again. And then I shall be near you always until you are free once more. You hear what I say?"

"Yes; but can I be certain that it is true? They tell me that I shall only leave it when the hour comes for me to die."

"That hour will not come for many years, and soon you shall be set at liberty. I swear that if you do not fret about the present, you shall be surrounded for the future by all that is beautiful."

"You do not mean in another world?" asked Marie, speaking no longer with the accent of indifference she had previously adopted.

"No; in this world, in the midst of everything you love," Ahmed answered solemnly, with an air of absolute assurance.

"Ah," she said, "I am glad you did not mean in heaven. Because, if there is such a place, I should not get to it."

"Hush! do not think of such things," said Ahmed, horrified by the amount of conviction she had put into the words. "Think only that I am your friend, and that I will not fail you. You believe it, Matuschka?"

"Yes,"

"And you will obey me?"

"Yes."

"Sleep then, my dove!"

As he said this, he passed his hands lightly over her hair, and downwards along her arms. He next led her gently to a bench into which she sank with a sigh of fatigue; and after a few moments she had closed her eyes.

When they returned to the surgery Meissener congratulated him on the ease with which he had re-established his influence over the condemned woman. But Ahmed knew that it would only be by a continued effort that he could retain his hold on Marie's will; he feared, moreover, that despair might reassert itself in her mind during the next two days. To prevent this he asked the prison doctor to give her a powerful sleeping draught on that and the following evening. And when Meissener hinted that he had no authority to do this, Ahmed replied —

"My dear colleague, from this moment I am answerable for everything that is done in these wards. It has been arranged that your holiday begins at eight o'clock to-morrow evening. You will, of course, receive official notice of this from Baron von Baltzan; but you may take my word for it that I have been appointed as your deputy. I hope you don't mind."

"Mind?" exclaimed the little man, almost jumping for joy at this unexpected piece of good news, "why, my dear fellow, I shall be eternally grateful to you. It's not only that I badly wanted a rest, but this miserable business has been getting on my nerves. On my word of honour, I am as sorry for the poor creature

as you are, and I rejoice that she should be under your care, because I could do nothing for her myself. But I say," he added in a less exuberant tone, "how about yourself? Can you bear it, my friend, when they come to lead her out to execution? You'll have to make the autopsy, you know!"

"Yes," said Ahmed, apparently unperturbed by the prospect. "I know; it is terrible, but ——"

"Nothing you or I can do will alter it now," said Meissener, interpreting his thought.

"I suppose not," said the other, bowing his head mournfully, as though in token of agreement.

As he would not see Ahmed again before he went on his holiday, Meissener insisted on showing him over the entire infirmary. He was particularly proud of the fine stock of fresh drugs, and he ascribed the absence of sickness to the fact that he always dispensed them freely. As an instance of his watchful supervision he cited the case of the man Mnischko, who would have been seriously ill, if the doctor had not immediately diagnosed the cause. "I gave him a dose of the same stuff that I take myself whenever I have an attack of liver brought on by being shut up in this beastly hole," he added. Ahmed listened attentively to all that the talkative little man had to say, and having extracted a promise from him to carry out his instructions with regard to the opiate, he bade him farewell, and departed.

It was only a little after nine when Ahmed left the prison, after he had said good-bye to the Governor. He went straight back to the restaurant at the cross-roads, saddled and bridled his horse, and rode off down

the hill towards the town. There he asked the first tradesman he saw if there was a good saddler in the place, and a sturdy red-faced butcher answered somewhat indignantly that better work was not to be found in the country than that of Martin Schultz in the Klostergasse. With a nod of thanks the young man hurried on to the shop of Herr Schultz and astonished that worthy by saying that he wanted a new set of double harness to take away with him. When he learned that it must fit the horse Ahmed was riding and another of the same build, he admitted that he had a set which might answer the purpose, but that it had been made to the order of a customer, the Graf von Altenberg, and that consequently it was not for sale. If, however, the stranger would give him time he would make another set.

"I cannot," said Ahmed, with the abruptness of one who was accustomed to be obeyed. "I will take the set you have and the Herr Graf must wait."

"Must indeed!" muttered Schultz, who, being a person of considerable importance in his own estimation, was outraged at being spoken to in so peremptory a fashion.

"Yes!" said Ahmed, quietly. "And the sooner you understand that the better. The price is of no consequence."

"Oh!" exclaimed the saddler, "that puts the matter in another light. Time is money, and the Herr Graf's money is a long time coming. Perhaps he can wait, if your Excellency pays cash down."

This Ahmed agreed to do as soon as he had seen the harness, and he made no demur on finding that it was

of a light collarless pattern designed for Graf Altenberg's new sporting-wagon. He ordered the saddler to pack it in two small sacks, and paid the somewhat exorbitant price without making any comment. Having tied the sacks together, he hung them across the front of his saddle, remounted his horse, and rode off down the street. In this very Klostergasse, he remembered, was the beer house where Mnischko and Marie had performed on the night when Giesecke met his death. Either this memory, or the fact that he had got chilled while stopping to bargain with the saddler, caused Ahmed to shiver slightly; whereupon he urged his horse into a sharp trot towards the open country.

The doctor was anxious not to attract attention, being unwilling that Herr Schultz should hear from some gossip at the Burg Keller who his customer had been. He had on that account threaded his way through the less-frequented streets, and had seen no face with which he was familiar. But among those who were astir at this comparatively early hour he had encountered one whose face left a distinct impression on him. At the moment when Ahmed had turned somewhat rapidly out of the Klostergasse, he had been obliged to rein in his horse in order to avoid knocking down a man who was walking in the middle of the road with his eyes bent on the ground. The stranger, who was of middle height, and who wore a three-cornered hat and a long flowing black cloak, had stepped quickly out of the way, and raising his eyes had looked steadfastly at Ahmed. In another second the priest had passed on, with a polite bow to Ahmed, and was soon out of sight, having apparently sunk at once into the

same deep meditations as before. The young man felt, however, that the priest had observed him closely enough to note every detail of his appearance, and he inwardly rejoiced that it was not the habit of priests to gossip with their neighbours.

With some little trouble he hit off the road by which he had come, about four or five kilometres outside the town, at the place where it emerged from the woods that extend right up to the castle walls. And two hours later he turned into the courtyard of the inn at Ober Karlsdorf. The ostler had been on the look-out for his coming and ran to his assistance immediately. But Ahmed, after giving him the sacks which contained the harness and telling him to put them in a place of safety, proceeded himself to take saddle and bridle off the horse. When he had ascertained that the other horse had been well looked after, Ahmed wasted no time in giving the stableman directions as to what was required of him. Then, having made him repeat his orders, he rewarded him with a gold coin, and promised him another if they were carried out faithfully. The doctor thereupon took a piece of paper from his pocket, and studied a sketch-map he had made before leaving Wilhelmsbrunn. He found that the nearest railway-station was only a kilometre from the village, and remembered that this was one of the reasons why he had selected Ober Karlsdorf for his change of horses. With a sheepskin cloak thrown over his shoulder and a big military saddle balanced on top of it, he looked a somewhat curious figure, when he walked into the little station at Karlsdorf. Luckily, however, there were few people about in the middle of the day

to see him, and as he only took a third-class ticket the railway officials imagined him to be the trainer or body-groom to some nobleman. He had been careful that neither they nor the ostler should see the grand ducal cipher on the bridle which he carried in his hand; and he was equally careful not to expose it to view when he alighted from the slow train at the Mittelburg terminus. Moreover, he did not engage a drosky from the rank in front of the station, but walked some little way until he met an old fellow, who was jogging along dozing on his box. However, on being told to go as fast as he could to the stable at Wilhelmsbrunn, he became thoroughly alert, and drove off at a good pace. Ahmed dismissed him with a handsome gratuity outside the entrance to the stable-yard, and carrying the saddle and bridle made straight for the men's quarters. There he handed the things to a helper, and sent an other to fetch the head groom. When that all-important functionary appeared the doctor gave him numerous instructions, which the man promised to see fulfilled. Nor did he venture to express any surprise on being informed that the pair of bays would not be brought back for a considerable time; since the Master of Horse had told him that the doctor must make whatever use of the grand ducal stable he desired.

It was almost dusk when Ahmed entered the sick-room that afternoon, and he apologised to Elsa for being over three hours behind his time. But she made light of this delay, declaring that she could look after her patient for sixty hours at a stretch, if their wants were supplied by the servants, who indeed had been most attentive. Yet Ahmed, noticing that the nurse

seemed a shade paler than usual, thought that the long hours of watching must have exhausted her. However, Elsa would not admit that this was the case, though she did not disguise the fact that the weak condition of Countess Lichtenthal had caused her some anxiety. And it was plain to Ahmed that the tender-hearted creature had suffered in sympathy with her charge. It distressed him also to find that the Countess's pulse had become more feeble, since he had last noted its fast, fluttering, intermittent throb. Still he hoped that she would nevertheless be strong enough to bear the journey next night. The actual wounds were in a most satisfactory state; while the surrounding inflammation had not extended. The nurse longed to ask Ahmed if he thought the Countess would recover; but the influence of her hospital training was too powerful to allow of her putting so direct a question to the doctor. She was not a little surprised, therefore, when he answered her unspoken thought by saying —

"Elsa, the case can only have one issue if we leave nature to take its course. On that account I have decided to remove this lady to a place where I can perform the operation I wrote to you about. Before you come back, then, you must get ready to start tomorrow evening. I shall want you here at six o'clock in the morning, as I have to catch an early train to Leipzig; and I may not be back till the last moment. Good night!"

He had ordered and it was not for her to criticise. But inwardly Elsa protested against what the man she loved was about to do. She felt that the removal of this woman in her present state involved a terrible risk,

no matter what precautions might be taken to minimise it. Why, then, she asked herself, was he willing to incur this risk? It would be better, of course, to run any risk rather than to allow the Countess to die, without making an attempt to save her. But would that overtaxed heart respond to another call? Elsa had such faith in Ahmed's surgical skill, that she did not doubt that if the thing were possible he would do it successfully. But, for the moment, she doubted whether he had correctly estimated the chances of recovery after the operation. And, with this painful feeling of uncertainty in her mind, the tired nurse found it very hard to fall asleep that night.

XIV

WHEN the fast train from Mittelburg arrived in Leipzig at a few minutes before eleven next morning, Ahmed had a big task before him. Knowing, therefore, that he had not a moment to spare he picked out a drosky of the first class, and soon reached Dr. Weigand's house. But he was greatly relieved when he discovered that the Professor was not in his rooms, having been called away to perform a difficult operation. Nor did he take long to collect the various instruments he required from his private cabinet. He explained to the laboratory attendant that he would not be able to pay his respects to the Professor, since he was much pressed for time; and hurried off with his bag. Ahmed's next call was on one of the leading instrument-makers, with whom he spent over half-an-hour in devising certain alterations in a litter, which the workmen promised to finish, so that he could take the thing with him by the two o'clock train. He also selected a portable dental machine and some fine-toothed circular saws, which he instructed them to pack separately. He then drove to the Brüderstrasse, stopping at a bookseller's on the way, and, having paid the driver for the hour, let him go.

The good Frau Mänkel was delighted to see Ahmed again, and Fritz was simply frantic with joy. Indeed,

he barked so loudly that the kind soul could hardly make herself heard. Her great anxiety was that the doctor should share her midday meal, and this he readily agreed to do, if she would excuse him meanwhile. He went on to say that he had come not only to wish her joy on the first day of the new year, but to ask her help as well. Certainly she would be glad to do anything in her power. What might it be? Could she direct him to some trustworthy dressmaker in the neighbourhood? Why, of course she could and would too! Fräulein Fuchs in the very next street made up customer's own material in all the latest fashions. But would she provide the material herself? To be sure she would if paid in advance. She was not rich, poor thing; she didn't rob people enough for that! Ahmed thanked Frau Mänkel, made a note of the number, and said that he would go round to the dressmaker at once, but would not forget to be back in good time for dinner. He then walked briskly off, and before long he had groped his way down a dark passage and up two flights of stairs, at the top of which he discovered a half glass door, with the name of Fuchs & Cie. painted on it.

For some time Fräulein Fuchs, a thin-faced, middle-aged woman with bright beads of eyes, could not understand what it was the young man wanted. But when she grasped at last that he wished her to make two black silk-velvet gowns to the rough measurements which he gave her, and in the fashion of a bygone age, she was utterly mystified. However, as Ahmed counted into her hand a quantity of gold coins, she saw that he meant business, and she undertook to execute this

unusual order to the best of her ability. Having directed her to get the dresses done within a week, and to despatch them by passenger-train to the railway-station at Zwirnau, where they would be called for, he turned to go, leaving the woman more puzzled than ever. But on reaching the door he looked round, and said almost as though it were an afterthought: "If I receive them in good time, I will send you a present of two hundred marks."

He did not go straight back to the Brüderstrasse; for, finding that he was not due there for a quarter of an hour, it occurred to him to call in at the bank. Ahmed had no intention of spending any of the money the Grand Duke had given him, without being able to render a detailed account for it. And as money is the only argument with many people, he felt it would be just as well to obtain a sufficient supply of it. He was, therefore, in the act of cashing a cheque, when one of the partners hurried out from behind a partition with a large square envelope in his hand. The banker delivered this to Ahmed with a friendly bow, and informed him that it had arrived two days before, together with a draft to the doctor's credit for twenty thousand marks. The largeness of the amount mentioned greatly surprised the young man, since, although his father had always been most generous, this sum far exceeded any that he had previously sent.

For a little while Ahmed stood gazing at the familiar green seal, wondering what thought was in the Prince's mind when he set his signet upon the wax. But he did not remain long in doubt on this point, for the banker having left him, he broke the seal and, running

his eye rapidly over the formal greetings written in an ornamental hand by a secretary, came at once to the pith of the letter. He then saw that his father had dictated a strong appeal to him to return home as soon as possible. Ahmed could detect beneath the scribe's polite Arabic phrases the rough vernacular of the old Afghan chief, who had always been a great man of arms, but never one of letters; and he was touched by the obvious sincerity of his father's affection. There was something also of self-interest in the Prince's letter. It appeared that he had been of late by no means pleased with the conduct of Nasrullah. Always arrogant, this young man's bearing had grown insufferable since he had felt himself secure of the succession.

Nasrullah had become the slave of wine and play, both of which were abhorrent to the true believer. Indeed, he had been at so much trouble to prove how unequal he would be to the responsibilities of government that his father thought seriously of appointing another in his place. The letter went on to hint, in thinly veiled terms, that this other would be Ahmed himself, if he were found wise and free from such Western sinfulness. It practically concluded with the announcement that funds had been placed at his disposal in order to enable him to travel as befitted a Prince. Then followed a string of salutations and benedictions which his father had evidently left to the discretion of the scribe. Ahmed refolded the parchment and put it into his pocket, along with the banknotes the cashier had handed to him in exchange for his cheque. As he walked back to the Brüderstrasse he turned its contents over slowly in his mind. Of

course, the thing was impossible, at any rate for some time to come. He had pledged his word to that woman at Zwirnau, and he had to reckon with the Grand Duke as well. There must be a settlement in full of all his obligations before he left the country. Then, perhaps, he might go back to dispute the throne of his fathers with Nasrullah Khan. For, though if he followed his own inclinations he would certainly remain where he was and pursue his career as a surgeon, he could not turn an altogether deaf ear to the call of kinship.

When the doctor took his accustomed place at the table where he had sat so often with Elsa, Frau Mänkel was full of questions about her. The sight of the dachshund also recalled her to Ahmed and caused him to feel a certain amount of self-reproach; for beyond seeing that she did not neglect the all-important matter of her health, he had not thought much about the nurse since she had been in attendance at Wilhelmsbrunn. But he was able to tell the good lady that she was quite well, a little overworked, perhaps, though not more so than must often have been the case before.

"Yes, poor girl," said Frau Mänkel, "they worked her hard enough at the hospital. And I am sure you would not let her do too much. You are more likely to overwork yourself; and, if you'll excuse my saying it, Herr Doctor, you are looking worn out, and as though you have been worried to death."

"Oh," replied Ahmed in a light tone, "it has been an anxious time for both of us, no doubt, but it will be over shortly, and then we can have a good rest."

"Not before you will want it," said she.

As soon as he had eaten a few of the good things the

servant girl set before them, and swallowed a cup of coffee, Ahmed had to take leave of his amiable hostess. There was one other thing he still had to buy, a portable stove, capable of warming a large carriage and of being moved about with safety. Not an easy thing to choose in a hurry; Ahmed considered himself lucky, therefore, when he found exactly what he wanted in the first ironmonger's shop that he entered. And this piece of good fortune gave him plenty of time at the station to claim the packages which the instrument-maker's men had brought, and to secure a comfortable seat before the express started. He also had time to send Baron von Baltzan a telegram, the sense of which would be intelligible only to him. It ran thus: "Everything arranged for observation, transit complete at three A.M."

Directly the train began to move Ahmed took one of the books he had bought that morning out of his pocket. It was a volume of Schiller's plays, the play which came first being "Maria Stuart," a tragedy; and so engrossed did the young man become in this dramatic story that he lost all consciousness of the outside world until the train drew up with a jerk in the brilliantly lighted station at Mittelburg. A few minutes later he was driving away over the trampled snow towards the stables of Wilhelmsbrunn, where he gave the stove to the head groom, telling him to have it placed in the big family waggon, which was to be used that night, and to have it lighted at once. From the stables he drove on to the palace; and, after seeing that the servants had brought the other two packages up to his room, he hurried off, bag still in hand, to see whether his patient had

improved during the day. When Elsa met him with a grave face, he knew at once that the Countess had lost, rather than gained, ground. But he had not been altogether unprepared for finding her weaker that evening; he had, in fact, brought with him an apparatus with which he hoped, for the time being, to restore her impaired vitality. Ahmed opened the bag, which he never allowed any one else to touch, and the nurse drew near to help him. But he would not allow her to do so, saying that he required no assistance, while she was obviously in need of rest. "Go and lie down for three hours," he said. "I shan't want you until ten o'clock. We start about eleven. You will be ready?"

"Yes," she answered, in a low voice, adding, after a slight pause, as though the words had escaped her; "but, Ahmed, is it safe?"

"Perfectly," he replied; "when you come back you will see a great change in the patient. As far as the journey is concerned you may make your mind quite easy, Elsa."

"And afterwards?"

"We must hope for the best."

"If the worst were to happen it would kill the Grand Duke."

"Yes," said Ahmed, softly; "if his wife were to die, he would take it greatly to heart, no doubt. Therefore we must contrive to keep her alive, no matter what happens. Remember that, Elsa! And now, please!"

He enforced his request by pointing towards the door, and Elsa, falling under the spell of that calm

reposeful manner, which never failed to inspire her with confidence, crept quietly from the room.

When the nurse returned, she found Countess Lichtenthal asleep, and Elsa knew, from the regularity of her breathing, that the patient was wonderfully better than when she had left her. It seemed almost as if the doctor had put new blood into those flaccid veins. Turning towards him with a look of admiration in her eyes, she became aware of the presence of the Grand Duke, who was sitting huddled up in an arm-chair by the fireplace. He had come to take leave of his beloved; but the Countess, being again in a lethargy, induced by the powerful soporific which Ahmed had previously administered, had not recognised him. As he sat there gazing into the fire, he was torn by contending emotions; sorrow at having to part with her like this, and fear that he might never see her alive again; but stronger than either was the hope that she would be saved, as it were, by a miracle, and given back to him in all her matchless beauty. This young man had promised that it should be so, and he was backed by the greatest authority in Europe. He must, therefore, be allowed to do whatever he considered best, no matter how hard the suspense might be to bear.

Elsa guessed what was passing in his mind, and she felt full of pity for him as he stood there, silently watching their preparations. After everything else had been made ready, she helped Ahmed to shift the sleeping woman gently on to the litter, which was placed at the side of her bed, and to put the covering in position, so as to screen it all round, leaving only a small breathing

space open. The next thing was to ascertain that the carriage had been brought round to the right place, and that it was sufficiently warm. To do this Ahmed had to go downstairs himself, and while the doctor was thus engaged, the Grand Duke walked across to where Elsa was standing and took her hand in his. He wished to express his gratitude to her for the sympathetic interest she had taken in the patient, but his heart was too full for coherent utterance, so that he could only press her hand and murmur the words, "Be kind to her!" He felt that this injunction was quite unnecessary, that the Madonna-like nurse could not be unkind to any one; still, though the words spoken in no way expressed his meaning, the look with which they were accompanied conveyed to Elsa that in some special manner he entrusted his wife to her care. But while she was glad to find he had so much faith in her, she felt that it involved a new and terrible responsibility.

The moment had come to move the patient, for Ahmed now returned with the two men whom he had previously instructed how to carry a litter. With his assistance they lifted it up from the bed, and walked slowly off with it, keeping well out of step. They were preceded by Ahmed, and followed by the Grand Duke and Elsa, together with the Countess's two maids, who were weeping bitterly, while the other servants stood aside, in a mournful attitude, to let them pass. It was quite dark under the colonnade, and torches were held aloft by the foresters, in order that the bearers of the litter might see their way. But outside the white park was bathed in a pale flood of moonlight. Ahmed quickly had the litter suspended from the big flat roof

of the carriage, and when Elsa had taken her place beside it, he closed the door, having first made sure that nothing had been left behind. Then, after bowing ceremoniously to his Royal Highness, he climbed on to the box and gave the coachman the signal to start.

Having been already told the road he was to travel, and the distance he was expected to make, the driver at once settled his splendid pair of black-browns into a steady trot which they kept up with ease. Nevertheless, nearly two hours elapsed before they reached the hill on the Wilhelmsbrunn side of Ober Karlsdorf. As they got to the top Ahmed was glad to see a man riding along towards them, and leading an extra horse. The grand ducal coachman seemed a little hurt when he was informed that he might now take his pair quietly back to the stable; but he set to work cheerfully to unharness his horses. Soon the bays were in their place, and Ahmed, mounting on the box with the ostler by his side, drove off down the hill.

After passing the village, Ahmed pulled up and told the ostler to hold the horses for a moment. He then went to the door of the carriage, and asked Elsa how she and her charge had borne the journey so far. But, on being assured that all was well, he did not go away at once, for, taking a small brush and a bottle containing some thick dark fluid from his pocket, he first painted over the royal crown which was emblazoned on the panel of the door. When this had been done, he mounted the box, gathered up the reins, and, having given the stableman two thalers for his master and another twenty-mark piece for himself, drove off again, leaving him thoroughly contented with his night's

work. Nor was the doctor less pleased with the way in which his orders had been carried out, and in which everything had gone exactly as he had planned. Above all the moon served him well, and was still bright when he walked his horses up the zigzag road which led to the heights above Zwirnau. It was, therefore, with a feeling of perfect satisfaction that he drew up at the entrance to von Baltzan's apartments in the Castle of Hohen-Zwirnau just as the abbey clock was striking three.

"To the moment," said the Governor, who had come out directly he heard the sound of wheels. "Driving yourself, too; you must be frozen, doctor."

He was accompanied by his two soldier-servants, and a groom ran forward from the adjoining stable to catch the horses' heads. But, before Ahmed allowed the men to approach the litter, he pulled the hood well down over the face of its occupant. The Governor himself then led the way up his own private staircase and through an iron door into the infirmary. Following him the two men turned into a large but well-heated room on the right of the corridor, and, having placed the litter on a bed, silently retired. Von Baltzan was about to copy their example when he came face to face with Elsa, and was so obviously captivated by her appearance that the doctor, after a moment's hesitation, made them known to each other. Whereupon von Baltzan overwhelmed Fräulein Hartvig with compliments, declaring that he was then and always at her service. Elsa, however, took so little notice of his polite attentions that he made no attempt to prolong them, and withdrew, as soon as he had given Ahmed a letter which Meissener had left for him.

The doctor then put a big screen round the door, so that on one opening it would see into the room; and having uncovered the litter, with Elsa's help quietly lifted the sleeping woman on to the bed. He found the pulse still quick, but steadier and stronger than it had been when he returned from Leipzig. The journey, therefore, had not hurt her, and, if she got over the shock of finding herself in strange surroundings as well, any danger from it might be said to have passed. But as he looked round the bare whitewashed walls and up at the deep-set barred windows, Ahmed was not without a feeling of misgiving. It was further strengthened by Elsa's asking him, in an awe-struck whisper, if the place were a prison. He had to admit that it was attached to one.

"That woman is here, then!" she said quickly.

"Yes," he replied.

"This is what you had in your mind when you wrote to me, Ahmed?"

"Well, to a certain extent. I had hoped to keep the poor creature alive, though. However, as that was not possible, I must make the best use I can of her when she is dead."

Elsa shuddered; she had grown familiar with horrors during her hospital experience, but there was something so ghoulish about this that it sent an involuntary thrill of revulsion through her whole body. She realised for the first time, that there were depths in Ahmed which she could not fathom. She did not in her heart believe him capable of cold-blooded cruelty, and yet it seemed to her, as it had seemed to von Baltzan, that he must be inhuman, if he could mutilate the corpse

of a woman he had admired. Utterly unable to find the key to the apparent contradictions between the young man's actions and his character, she said nothing more at the time; but went to the room which had been set apart for her, to change her travelling clothes, so that she might be able to come on duty again directly.

Ahmed, left to himself, sat down by the bedside, and opening Meissener's letter began to read it.

"My dear colleague," the doctor wrote, "I must once more thank you for the much-needed holiday which your kindness permits me to take. Whenever you wish to recall me, you have only to telegraph to the address of my brother-in-law, Baron Kaunitz, Berlin W., Matthäikirchstrasse 16, and I will be back in twelve hours. Not that you will find your duties heavy, as there are very few prisoners, none of whom are at present on the sick-list. If any of them complain of being ill, you may get a hint from my case-book as to what is the matter with them. Generally it turns out to be either liver or malingering, but it is sometimes both of these combined, as each tends to bring on the other. However, you will devote most of your time to Marie Schüler, and I am glad to report that I left her at eight o'clock in a fairly satisfactory state. I gave her a stiff sleeping-draught last night, which had the desired effect, and I have given her another not quite so strong this evening. But I believe your presence is more likely to prevent the woman from becoming melancholy mad than any drugs would ever be. At any rate, you have my cordial good wishes in your self-appointed task. — With reiterated

best thanks, I have the honour to be, your most obedient servant, Adolph Meissener, Doc. Med. *Postscriptum.* — The enclosed pass-key opens every door in the infirmary, where you will be entirely your own master."

The young man's forehead was drawn into a frown when he came to the final words. "His own master?" he thought; "yes, he meant to be that now!" After eliminating Dr. Engelbrecht and the sisters of mercy, and even the Professor himself, from the case, he would scarcely let any one else interfere with his treatment of it. The Grand Duke would not attempt to do so, for he had promised to be content with a daily bulletin. And, though Herr von Baltzan regarded the proposed operation with the utmost disfavour, he would not dare to act contrary to an express command. As Ahmed was turning these things over in his mind, he suddenly became conscious of the fact that Countess Lichtenthal had awakened. On looking at her he saw that she had apparently remained quite still; she had, however, opened her eyes, and her gaze had been slowly wandering round the room; while an expression of bewilderment came into her drawn features. But a peaceful smile took its place when the doctor leaned over towards her and whispered the one word, "Fotheringay."

XV

AHMED'S first care in the morning, after a few hours' rest, was to visit the end ward. Marie had never been out of his thoughts for one moment since he had last seen her, and it was with a feeling of trepidation that he knocked gently at the door. Knowing that success entirely depended on her preserving the balance of her mind, and that the least jar might snap the slender thread by which her reason hung, he was filled with vague fears. However, when Frau Schmidt, who had been told he would take over Meissener's duties from that day, let him in, he experienced an immediate sense of relief. Marie had risen already, and was braiding her long yellow hair with her accustomed neatness; moreover, she recognised him at once. "You have kept your words," she said, catching sight of his face in the glass, and looking round.

"You did not doubt that I would?" he asked.

"No!" she said, in a tone of unconcern, turning her back to him again, and tying up one of her long plaits with a piece of ribbon. Seeing that she was about to bind up her hair, he said, as though the idea had just occurred to him, "Why don't you arrange it high on your head, Matuschka? It would look better!"

"You think so?" she replied, glancing in the mirror, and twisting the plaits together. Then with two or

three deft turns she formed them into a heavy coil well up on the back of her head.

"That's ever so much better," said Ahmed, when she looked at him again as if inviting his approval. "Isn't it, Frau Schmidt?" he added, turning towards the attendant.

"Yes," said she, after surveying Marie critically for a little while. "It gives her less the air of a country woman, and more that of a gracious lady."

"She is right, Matuschka; you have the look of a great lady now!" said the doctor, with an accent of intense gratification.

"Really?" asked Marie, coquettishly, glancing at the mirror again in a self-satisfied manner.

"Of course," he replied quickly, "you always were like one, and you have only put on the air of a peasant girl, because it was in character with your dancing. But you don't care about poor people, do you, Matuschka? You prefer to read about the great?"

"I like to hear what they do best!"

"Well, I have brought you some books that are all about princes and princesses, and love-making and duels. Will you read them?"

"That I will!"

"Very good!" he said, handing her two or three richly illustrated volumes which the Leipzig bookseller had recommended to him. "Here they are!" Then pointing to one of them, he added in a soft persuasive tone: "Begin with this; it is the story of a beautiful lady who marries a prince. Try to put yourself in her place; you ought not to find it hard."

Marie smiled as she took the volumes from him; and,

spreading the book he had indicated out on her lap, she was soon absorbed in the pictures.

"If she reads that," he thought, "it will distract her from her sourroundings;" while, with a nod to Frau Schmidt, who had resumed her interminable knitting, he silently left the room.

His next business was to pay a visit to the prison proper. Letting himself in by his pass-key to the gallery, he made his way to the chief warder's office.

Herr Holtzmann sprang to his feet on seeing Ahmed; but expressed no surprise, since he too had been informed that the Leipzig surgeon would take Dr. Meissener's place for a time. He had no cases of illness to report, and was glad to say that, for the moment, all was well. His assistants could certainly not complain of being overworked, as there was hardly anything for them to do.

"There was no need of a big new building in such a dead-and-alive place as this, sir," he said; "our old quarters in the castle would have done well enough. But, after the last prison congress in Petersburg, the Grand Duke sent a Herr Sanitätsrat to visit us, and he insisted that, unless we were moved at once, we should all die of gaol fever. They built this wing for us then, on a plan the doctors declared was a model of comfort. But all I can say, sir, with respect to your colleagues, is that I have been a martyr to rheumatism ever since."

Ahmed let the chief warder talk on unchecked, for he was anxious to get on good terms with him, and had sufficient knowledge of men to know that nothing has a greater effect on them than a sympathetic attitude

towards their grievances. There was also one possibility which he rather dreaded.

He did not want to see Mnischko; and wished, therefore, that if the condemned man had any recurrence of his chronic trouble, the nature of which he guessed, to be able to send him Meissener's usual prescription, without being called upon to pay him a visit. This was a matter which would rest to a large extent with Holtzmann; for that reason, Ahmed went carefully into the chief warder's symptoms, and told him exactly what to eat and what to avoid. He also promised to send him some saline tablets which would act like a charm upon his rheumatism. But, perhaps, what pleased Holtzmann most was the information that his malady was of a different character to the ordinary ailment, being known to the faculty as "Rheumatoid Arthritis." Holtzmann showed his satisfaction by the solemn manner in which he asked the doctor to pronounce this new name for his complaint again; and Ahmed saw that he had made a firm friend of the chief warder, who was not now likely to disturb him without serious cause, and Mnischko's trouble was not of a serious nature. At the door Ahmed paused a second, and then, slipping a hundred-mark note into the chief warder's hand, told him to see that the condemned man did not want for any little comforts which the rules permitted.

"Ah, doctor," said Holtzmann, with a grin, "that will do him more good than Herr Meissener's mixture!" adding, as he smoothed out the stiff slip of paper, "it's a prescription he couldn't make up."

Having thus quickly discharged his formal duties,

Ahmed returned to the business on which his attention was centred. On entering the ward where the Countess was lying, he found that Elsa again looked grave. The patient's pulse was considerably weaker, and her temperature somewhat below normal. Every indication of the danger of a rapid collapse was present, not so markedly, perhaps, as on the previous evening, but the means he had used to avert it then were no longer available. However, if the blood-pressure could not be again restored by an infusion of salt-water, there were other methods of stimulating the heart's action, and Ahmed's resources would not be exhausted until they had all been tried. He had, therefore, no immediate fear for the patient's life; nevertheless he was not without a keen sense of disappointment. And, as he mentally ticked off the days, he asked himself whether her strength would hold out till the date fixed for the execution.

He came to the conclusion that, provided extreme care were taken of her, she ought to last for another eleven days, but it would be chiefly due to the way in which she was nursed. This reflection reminded him how much he owed already to the watchfulness of Elsa, and how much he still relied on her help. He felt that he had been in a manner neglecting her of late. It was not likely that she would fancy herself slighted by his devoting his entire attention to the patient; but, if she guessed that his thoughts had been occupied by that other woman, she would most certainly be indignant. And how could he tell that she had not guessed? She had been quick to read his thoughts before. It seemed strange, too, that she had said nothing when

she heard Marie was in this very place. Had she ceased to be jealous of her, he wondered, now that the end was so close at hand?

Elsa had remained silent also this morning; even now that she was going, she only whispered "Good-bye!" Ahmed followed her, and when they were outside the door, put his arms round her and drew her to him. She looked back, uttering a low cry of alarm, which he stifled with a kiss. But there was no responsive warmth in Elsa's lips, as she tried gently to free herself from his embrace.

Releasing her at once, the young man said in a tone of reproach, "You are not angry with me?"

"Oh, no," she answered rapidly, with an accent of distress, "only you took me by surprise, and I was afraid that some one might see us."

"You used not to think of others when I kissed you."

"It was different then, Ahmed: we had only ourselves to think of. But we are bound to consider others now; we are in a position of trust."

"Of course we are!" he replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, but ——"

"What?"

"Nothing!"

Elsa shook her head as she said this, and turning away from him went into her room on the opposite side of the corridor.

"What can she mean?" thought Ahmed, as he slowly re-entered the ward. There was that in her tone, though she had spoken lightly, which pointed to some deep-rooted conviction; and if she had merely intended

to allude to the paramount duty that a doctor owes to his patient, why had she hesitated? Soon, however, he ceased to puzzle over what the real significance of Elsa's words had been, for he had several more pressing problems to solve. Above all, there were two sources of imminent danger; on the one hand, the critical state of Marie's mind, and on the other, Countess Lichtenthal's great physical weakness, both of which conditions required the most delicate treatment. In the first case he could almost count on preventing any further mental disturbance by the use of suggestion, while in the second he expected that an equally good result would be produced by the same means, only in this case the suggestion must come from the patient herself. Still if he were so fortunate as to succeed in both cases, he had yet to face a difficult and complicated operation.

In order to perform this operation with assurance of success, the subject would have to be kept in a state of complete insensibility to pain for a prolonged period. And Ahmed felt that, to obtain perfectly favourable conditions, it would be advisable to use the newly discovered anæsthetic, but first he would have to try the action of the drug upon a human being; and he, therefore, came to the conclusion that this ought to be done at once. If the initial experiment proved inconclusive, it might then be repeated, allowing an interval between the injections, which could not take place close together, for fear that the effect of the poison should be cumulative.

During the day, when not actively engaged in attending to his patient, Ahmed busied himself with the

study of certain note-books which contained a detailed account of various experiments which he had made, under the new anæsthetic, upon a large number of highly organised animals. With the aid of the data thus collected he worked out roughly what the maximum strength of the injection should be in the case of a man; and once he had settled this all-important point to his own satisfaction, with characteristic self-command he dismissed the matter from his mind.

The doctor then resumed his interrupted reading of Schiller's play, and was quickly engrossed in the tragic fifth act. No doubt many of its beauties escaped him; but he was too much interested in the story, of which he had scarcely known the outlines, to find it dull. By the time he had finished this it was dusk; but he sat for a long while without lighting the lamp. He could understand now the hold that such a part might obtain over the imagination of a sensitive actress. What was more probable, therefore, than that, in any sudden reverse of fortune, she might identify herself with this much-persecuted lady? Thus musing, he was startled by hearing among the words, which the Countess continued to mutter to herself when free from pain, some of those that he had been reading.

"Be calm, Hanna! These baubles do not make a queen." She was going through her part from the first entrance; and she seemed to know that he was listening, for she spoke the lines far more clearly than usual, and with such a nice appreciation of their value that before long the doctor's eyes were moist with tears. It was only when, her voice gradually growing faint, she at last lapsed into silence, that Ahmed perceived

that his suggestion had already borne fruit. Even then the thought was too greatly tinged with sadness to leave any room for a sense of triumph. In this sombre frame of mind he lighted the lamp and turned to the task of writing his daily report to the Grand Duke. But the fact that his heart was full of pity for the Countess made it all the harder to find words of comfort for her husband.

Ahmed was still writing when the nurse returned.

"You have come back sooner than I expected, Elsa," he said, looking up at her.

"I have rested long enough," she answered.

"Well," said the doctor, bringing his letter to a close and sealing it up, "I am glad you are here now because you can go off all the earlier. I don't believe you have slept very much lately, and you must get a little more fresh air. You will take a good walk to-morrow afternoon."

He had spoken the last sentence in a tone of command, but so kindly that Elsa was touched by his evident solicitude for her health. She could not help feeling also that she had wronged him in her thoughts of late; and on this account she was anxious to make amends for her coldness to him that morning. But they had fallen back into their relations of doctor and nurse; this then was not the time for personal explanation, especially as he had turned his attention to the patient. As she watched his gentleness in handling the wounded surface and in applying the fresh gauze, she was still more ashamed of her doubts. She had often seen him at work before, but never with an air of greater devotion to the task in hand.

On reflection, therefore, Elsa felt sure that, whatever the risks of operating might be, Ahmed was right to incur them, and that he would do nothing without taking every possible precaution. She had a striking proof of this shortly; for, when the doctor had finished the dressing and had made a final examination of his patient, he drew Elsa aside, saying, "I want you to help me to-night in an experiment I am trying."

The nurse murmured that she would be glad to do anything she could, and he continued — "I am going to give myself a dose of the anæsthetic I used in the case of our Fritzchen, and I want you to look in at the surgery once or twice to see how it acts."

"But are you sure it is safe, Ahmed?" she asked, in a tone of great anxiety.

"One is never sure of anything," he replied with a smile, "only the Professor and I have so much faith in our discovery that we intend to give it a trial. I want to employ this extract," he added, taking the cherished phial from his pocket, "in my forthcoming operation; and it is first necessary to see how the drug acts on the human body. I propose to test that thoroughly to-night, and all I require you to do is to find out if am I in the least degree sensible to pain during the first four hours after the injection."

"Ahmed," she cried, unable to suppress her fears, "have you thought how much depends on your life? The safety of your patient, and — and —" But she could not complete the sentence, as her voice died away in her throat.

"Yes," he said calmly, placing his hand on her

shoulder. "But the thing has to be done, and you must help me."

"Of course I will do that," she replied.

"Thank you, Elsa! I shall take the stuff about midnight, and you will find me lying on the couch in there," he said, pointing in the direction of the surgery. "When you come to see me, I want you to apply the terminals of an electric battery you will find on the table to these muscles," and he touched the side of his face. "If they do not contract, you will then know that the anæsthesia is deep-seated. It ought to pass off by about four o'clock."

Ahmed went towards the door, but, turning as he came to the screen round it, he looked back, and said in a quiet matter-of-fact tone, "If it shouldn't, you will find a paper on the table containing directions what to do."

Yet in spite of the casual manner in which he had spoken these last words, Elsa felt that he had realised how serious his danger was. For a long while she sat shivering with terror, and it was only with a great effort that she at length recovered her self-possession. Whatever happened, she determined to carry out his orders, and if anything went wrong not to lose her head.

After Ahmed had seen the Governor and given him his letter for the Grand Duke, with a word of thanks for the way in which all his wants had been anticipated, he went at once to the end ward. There he was delighted to learn from the attendant, who had replaced Frau Schmidt, that Marie had read herself to sleep with her picture book. On hearing this piece of good news he declined to go inside, as he had no wish to

disturb her; and walked softly away towards the surgery.

For some little time the doctor busied himself about the room, making up the fire for the night. He then changed the clothes he had been wearing all day for a more comfortable suit, and put on a flannel shirt, with a loose collar, so that his breathing would be perfectly free. The next thing to be done was to write out the instructions he had promised to leave for Elsa; and to put what she might need within her reach.

When all these preparations were finished, Ahmed looked at his watch and found that it marked a few minutes to twelve. Seeing that the hour for his experiment had nearly arrived, he rinsed a hypodermic syringe in boiling water; then he poured some distilled water into a measuring glass, and added to it, drop by drop, a minute quantity of the volatile fluid contained in his sealed tube. After comparing the amount of the drops he had counted with the difference shown by the scale engraved on the tube, he re-sealed it carefully, and put it back in its case. Sitting down on the sofa, he next wound up his watch and placed it open on the table by his side, along with a small electric battery, a flask of brandy, some glass capsules in a bottle, and a sheet of notepaper on which were a few boldly written lines. Nothing more remained for him now to do, but to fill the syringe, and hold it in his hand until the clock struck.

Up to that moment he had been too busy to think about anything except what he was doing; but in the brief space, during which he waited for the hands of his watch to point together to the hour, Elsa's words

recurred to him. Was he justified, he thought, in taking any risk, when so much depended upon him? And once again he answered the question in the affirmative. For, in order that the operation which he had in view should be entirely successful, it was necessary that it should be performed single-handed. He would, therefore, require much more time than it was possible to obtain by the use of ordinary anæsthetics. It was then essential that he should use the new drug, and to do this with absolute security he must make a preliminary trial of it on himself. So no sooner did the first stroke of midnight sound from the abbey tower than Ahmed plunged the needle under his skin, and slowly pressed the piston home.

The action of the drug was not so swift as to prevent him from replacing his syringe, and stretching himself in an easy attitude on the couch. But though he had no sudden sensation of paralysis, before long the objects in the room grew indistinct, and then it seemed to the young man as though he were being borne swiftly aloft.

After a little while this fancy took a definite form, and he imagined that bearers were carrying him up the slopes of a great mountain in his own land, far up above the snow-line, to a height where the air was wonderfully pure, but oh! — so difficult to breathe — though one seemed almost to float in it, one's body felt so light — and all around it was still — dead still.

When Elsa crept into the surgery, at about half-past twelve, Ahmed was lying motionless with his head thrown back, and his limbs extended stiffly. But on listening to his heart she discovered that it was beating regularly. However, the muscles of his face remained

quiescent when she stimulated them with the electric current, though when she excited those in the ball of her thumb it twitched violently. He was, therefore, in a state of complete insensibility, and the nurse could see no cause for alarm so far. She went back to the ward in a less anxious frame of mind; but as a precaution, took with her the paper of instructions, so that she might study them at her ease.

The Countess had fallen into light slumber, and Elsa was able to leave her every now and then with an easy conscience, and during the next three hours she paid several visits to the surgery, without remarking any particular change in the doctor's condition. But as four o'clock approached, she expected that his facial muscles would again gradually respond to the electric current. Yet not only did this not happen, but his breathing became shallow and gasping, while the heart's action was perceptibly weaker.

Soon also Elsa was horrified to see his face grow livid, and his eyes congested, while a thin froth spread itself over his lips. She knew then that there was not a moment to be lost; and without getting flurried, she at once set to work to bring Ahmed back to consciousness. Directly she had wiped the foam from his mouth, she undid his collar and turned his shirt back. She next pulled his tongue well forward, and breaking one of the glass capsules in a handkerchief held it to his nose. When this had been done, she ran to the window and threw it open; then, fetching some cold water, she dashed it in the young man's face. But as he still gave no sign of life, Elsa realised that she must have assistance. Therefore, she went quickly down

the passage, and knocked at the first door she came to. After a slight pause she was answered by Fräulein Finke in a drowsy voice; however, as soon as she understood what was wanted of her, the woman promised to come at once.

Elsa hurried away to the ward, and, having made sure that the Countess was still asleep, turned out the lamp; then, locking the door after her, she went quickly back to the surgery, where she was joined before long by Fräulein Finke. Acting under Elsa's directions, she alternately dragged the doctor's arms back above his head and pressed them close to his sides, while Elsa herself made use of the battery to stimulate his respiration. After what seemed to both of them an age, they heard the welcome sound of the air being drawn into his lungs, and by degrees he began to breathe again. Their next care was to keep him perfectly quiet, and as soon as it was possible induce him to swallow a big dose of brandy. But it was a long while before he became conscious of what was going on around him. His face even then remaining deadly pale, and his pupils dilated.

At last, however, satisfied that all danger had passed, Elsa was able to let Fräulein Finke resume her broken night's rest, after thanking her for the prompt aid she had rendered. Left alone with Ahmed, Elsa endeavoured to restore his circulation by wrapping him in blankets, and she was rewarded shortly by seeing the colour return to his pallid lips.

His first thought when he came fully to himself was of her. "Elsa," he whispered, "but for you I should be dead."

Then for an instant her presence of mind vanished, and bending down she pressed her warm lips against his. "I only carried out your instructions," she said softly, "and, thank Heaven, you did not die."

A moment later he suddenly rose up with a look of grave apprehension in his face. "But how long have you been here?" he asked, in a hoarse voice.

"Over an hour!"

"Then some one may have seen the Countess."

"No; I locked the door."

"Elsa!" he cried, in a tone of admiration, and with a sigh of immense relief, sank back on the couch exhausted.

XVI

ELSA did not get the walk, which the doctor had ordered her, that day, it being quite dark before Ahmed came to take her place. Since the crisis of the morning, he had slept for several hours, and on waking long after noon he had found that the depression caused by the poison had almost entirely disappeared. Still he allowed himself to be persuaded by the nurse, to take a turn in the open air himself, so that he might shake off the effects of the drug altogether.

After a brisk walk Ahmed returned to the prison with his mental faculties no longer dulled. And he soon had reason to be glad that this was so. For, on going to the end ward, he found Marie in a violently disturbed state of mind. Directly she saw him she ran towards him and clinging to him, exclaimed, "You are safe then! But why didn't you come this morning? I was afraid you were ill." These words were followed by an outburst of hysteria, and Ahmed felt that he would have to exercise the fullest power of his will to calm her. Knowing that it was useless to ask the excited woman any questions, he turned for an explanation to Frau Schmidt, who informed him that the attendant on duty during the night had told her that the prisoner had awakened in a fright about four o'clock, as if from a bad dream. And, though this had passed

off after a time, Marie had been very restless ever since, seeming to be alarmed about something or somebody. "It would look almost," she added, "as though she was anxious on your account, sir."

"Yes," said the doctor, "it does look like that."

"And it's hardly strange if she were, when you didn't come to see her," remarked the woman, with a meaning smile.

"I was prevented from paying her a visit this morning," said Ahmed, omitting to point out that Marie's anxiety began long before the hour at which she could reasonably have expected to see him. He had no wish to enlighten Frau Schmidt as to the intimate psychic relations which existed between him and her charge, though in his own mind he had no doubt what had caused the phenomenon of the early morning. Evidently his influence had reasserted itself over Marie, and so long as he was at no great distance she would possess a subconscious knowledge of his presence. But when his vital forces began to decline, she would immediately become conscious that something she looked to for support was slipping away from her. It was an interesting, if not uncommon, experience; and very welcome to Ahmed, since it rendered his task all the easier. But his active energies were at once directed to soothing Marie's passionate though shallow emotions. The woman rocked to and fro under the stress of the nerve-storm to which she had abandoned herself: possibly not without a certain sense of pleasure. However, Ahmed took care not to touch her, knowing that direct contact would only aggravate her hysteria. But, lifting both his hands above her head, he lowered

them gently until they were within less than an inch of her hair; he then passed them slowly over it and on downwards, following the outline of her form; and then, with a wide sweep up, he raised them again to their first position. This movement he repeated several times, without any apparent effect; but, at length, she ceased to sway her body and gradually became quite silent.

When Ahmed had looked at her steadily for a little while, her arms dropped to her sides, and she half-closed her eyes.

"Matuschka, you should beg Frau Schmidt's pardon for making such a scene," said he, in a tone of admonition, as though reproving a fractious child.

"I am sorry, very sorry!" she replied, with a far-off sound in her voice.

"There's no need to be," said the attendant, good-naturedly; "I understood what upset you, my dear."

Marie paid no attention to the words which were meant so kindly; but, turning away, went over to the stove and sat down in her usual chair.

"She has forgotten all about it," said Ahmed, with a gesture of apology. "We had best leave her to herself for the present," he added in a whisper, as, unnoticed by Marie, he quietly left the room.

Elsa was standing at the table, bending over a spirit-lamp, when Ahmed entered. But she looked up as the door opened, and smiled with pleasure on seeing that the young man was quite himself again. He wanted to set her free at once, but she insisted playfully that she could not trust him with the cup of meat-extract she was preparing for the patient. From her tone he

gathered that Elsa was now more confident about the Countess, and, as he found that the sick woman had rallied considerably, it was with a far lighter heart than on the previous evening that he sat down to write his report to the Grand Duke. Having put this in an unaddressed envelope, he asked Elsa to give it to von Baltzan, and then bade her good-night charging her solemnly not to return until next evening. For the following twenty-four hours Ahemd looked after his patient alone, and succeeded in maintaining the improvement she had already made, though her vitality was still at a low ebb. He also contrived to retain his hold on the mind of the woman in the end ward, and when he mentally commanded Marie to centre her thoughts upon her book, he knew that she had at once obeyed. With the Countess, too, his suggestion had worked well; for not only did she seem oblivious of her actual surroundings, but the idea of her threatened disfigurement seemed to be fading, little by little, from her mind.

At the appointed hour Elsa came back, looking all the better for her rest and a long tramp in the keen frosty air on the castle heights. But the doctor would not listen to her proposal that she should take some of his duty, and insisted that henceforth the nurse must do no more than her share of the work. In the morning, therefore, he relieved her at six o'clock, forbidding her to return until the same hour that evening. And in this manner they replaced one another each twelve hours for the next two days and nights, during which time there was no apparent change in the patient's condition.

On the third morning Ahmed informed Elsa that he would remain that day till midnight, when she would in turn have to take a watch of eighteen hours; so that, from the next evening, he should be on guard at night and she during the day. This process of reversing their hours gave the nurse a little longer time on hand than usual, and having taken a great fancy to Fräulein Finke, Elsa thought she would like to have her as a companion. She, therefore, asked the first woman she met in the corridor if Nurse Finke was at liberty.

"No," replied the attendant, "not till this evening."

"That won't be any use; it will be dark again then," said Elsa, sorrowfully. "Can't she get off before?"

"No, she can't," said the woman, with a laugh, "Finke has only just gone on duty. Down there," she added, pointing back over her shoulder to the end ward; "she took my place."

"Where is she?" asked Elsa.

"In the last room on your left; she's with the condemned woman." And having said this, the prison nurse hurried off to her own quarters. Left thus abruptly to herself, Elsa hesitated for some time what to do next. There could then be no use in saying anything about a walk to Fräulein Finke; and yet Elsa turned instinctively towards the place to which the prison nurse had pointed. Some force, over which she had no control, seemed to drag her in that direction. But, as she stood irresolutely staring at the iron door of the end ward, she knew that she was impelled solely by a desire to see the woman in whom Ahmed took such a profound interest. Elsa felt that it would be weak of her to yield to this impulse; but nevertheless

she yielded, and she knocked softly on the sliding panel of the door. After a little while it was drawn back, and Fräulein Finke's face appeared in the opening.

"Oh, it's you, nurse," she said, with an accent of surprise.

"Yes," stammered Elsa. "I wanted you to come for a walk."

"It was very kind of you, but I can't to-day."

"I know."

"Still you thought you'd tell me."

"Yes."

"I am glad you did, nurse. It's something to know that you remembered me."

"I haven't forgotten how kind you were the other night."

"Oh, that was no more than any one would have done. Besides the doctor did me a good turn once. If it hadn't been for him I'd have had a wild beast to look after. He's all right now, I hope?"

"Quite, thank you! Good-bye!" said Elsa, turning to go.

"Stop a minute," exclaimed the attendant. "Don't run away without seeing *her!*"

"Can I?"

"Yes! I mayn't let you in; but I'll leave the grill open for a moment, and you can look through it." Fräulein Finke thereupon stepped aside; and Elsa, by putting her head close to the door, was able to see into the room.

Her eyes at once became fixed on Marie, who was lying down reading by the light of an oil lamp. For some time Elsa could not see her face, but before long

she glanced up from the book as she turned a page. And in a second the nurse's heart was filled with envy.

"Would any one look at me, who had ever seen her?" she asked herself. "How could any man fail to admire such a face?" she thought. "So perfect, and yet unlike all other faces!" Then a doubt suddenly flashed upon her: "Was it so unlike all other faces? Surely there was one like it, a face which she knew. Yes, there could be no question that this woman bore an extraordinary resemblance to the Countess. It was strange that Ahmed had never alluded to it. Could it be that he had not seen the likeness?"

Reflecting that this was scarcely possible, since nothing so patent could escape the notice of such a practised observer, Elsa withdrew in silence and the panel was immediately closed. The same thoughts haunted her while she took a solitary walk that afternoon, causing her to wonder whether there was any connection between Ahmed's reticence about this likeness and his dread that during her absence in the surgery some one might have seen Countess Lichtenthal. When Elsa returned to the ward at midnight, she had it in her mind to mention the subject to him if an opportunity arose. But the first words he spoke startled her so much that she forgot everything else.

"I am going to test that stuff again," he said calmly, as though it were a matter of course. "But you need not be frightened, Elsa. I shall not take more than half the quantity. My only fear is that it will have no effect."

"After the alarm it caused us last time, I do not think you ought to run such a risk," said she, in an anxious tone and with a look of reproach.

Ahmed hastened to assure her that there was no risk whatever; so, as usual, she gave way, promising, with the best grace she could, to assist him once more. On this occasion, however, Ahmed's estimate of the action of the drug proved perfectly correct. For the nurse found that a smaller dose rendered him insensible, but did not produce relaxation of the muscles. And, on becoming conscious, he had been forced reluctantly to admit that this was not sufficient for his purpose. Doubtless, after a number of tests on various individuals, it would be possible to ascertain the exact amount which, without endangering the life of the subject, gave complete anæsthesia. But he had not the time for such trials, and, so far as his forthcoming operation was concerned, the newly discovered drug would be of no use. This must seriously affect his plans, but it should not make them impracticable. Though in one important particular he would have to modify them, for he would now require the help of somebody.

When Ahmed paid his usual morning visit to the end ward about eight o'clock he found Marie dozing, and not having met Fräulein Finke since the night on which she had been called up by Elsa, he took the opportunity to thank her for the prompt assistance she had rendered. He congratulated her also on the fact that the condemned woman had become apparently indifferent to her fate, without relapsing into melancholia. Then he hurried off to see the chief warder, with whom he

had been careful to keep in close touch. Herr Holtzmann not only reported that all was well in the prison, but declared that the rheumatic pains in his joints were already beginning to disappear under the doctor's treatment. Ahmed, however, protested that the credit was entirely due to his own perseverance. Whereupon they parted, on the best possible terms, Holtzmann ushering the doctor out with as much ceremony as though he had been Baron von Baltzan himself.

On getting back to the surgery Ahmed opened his pocket-book, and studied certain notes he had made in it. From one of these, written on the day of his journey to Leipzig, he found that there was a matter which needed immediate attention. He likewise verified the date of the execution, and mentally resolved to ask the Governor at what hour it would be carried out. Early, no doubt, so that the prisoner now had rather less than four days to live; and Ahmed felt that he had no time to lose in making his final preparations.

Glad to be abroad in daylight once more, the young man walked with a swinging easy stride down towards the narrow streets of Zwirnau. Hastening onwards he crossed the busy market-place, and turned into a street that led, through one of the dark stone gates, out to the big, yellow-brick railway-station. This was so full of country people bringing farm-produce to the city, that it was a long time before he could attract the attention of the official who presided over the parcels department. While he was waiting he had more than sufficient leisure to reflect upon the fact that it was from this very place that the trunk which held Giesecke's body had been despatched, and presumably by the people en-

gaged in registering luggage at that moment. At last, however, the important personage who sat in a little glass case writing out receipts glanced in Ahmed's direction, intimating that his turn had come. On being asked by the doctor if a parcel for him had arrived from Leipzig, he acknowledged that a box so addressed was in his possession. Only before giving it up he must satisfy himself that Ahmed was the person for whom it was intended. The doctor chafed visibly under this fresh delay; but he made no audible protest; and before long he convinced the departmental chief, by means of some old envelopes, that he was indeed the Dr. Ahmed to whom the parcel in question was directed. The great man thereupon waved his hand towards an oblong card-board case on a distant shelf, and immediately one of his satellites brought it to Ahmed, together with a paper which must be signed before the box was taken away.

"You may open it first," said the porter, "to see that the contents are not damaged."

"Thank you; it isn't necessary," Ahmed replied.

"No claim can be allowed afterwards," growled the chief in a tone of warning.

"None will be made!"

Thus reassuring the mind of that exalted official, Ahmed marched off with the box under his arm, and walked straight back towards the castle, only stopping twice on the way. The first time he was compelled to do so by meeting Herr Ehrlich, who condoled with him on the rejection of their appeal to the Minister of Justice, at the same time asserting that they had done everything which was possible to save this woman's life.

"You have done your part, Herr Ehrlich," said the doctor, solemnly. "And I am doing what I can."

"You are going to see her now?"

"Yes; I have just come from the station."

"You have some hope left?"

"I shall not give up hoping until all is over."

"That's right, my friend!" exclaimed the Rechtsanwalt, grasping Ahmed's hand warmly. Guessing however, that the young man was impatient to be gone, he did not detain him any longer.

The rate at which, in spite of his burden, Ahmed walked away showed that the lawyer had not been wrong. Yet, notwithstanding his evident desire to waste no more time, he spent a good quarter of an hour in the fashionable ladies' shop of Zwirnau, over the choice of a little gift for Marie. The article he wanted, being one worn only in summer, was not on sale; but, as he refused every sort of substitute, the shop-girl contrived to find something of the kind among the last season's stock, though it had become so soiled that she was greatly surprised he bought it.

Ahmed locked the door of his room before he began to unpack the cardboard case, labelled Madame Fuchs et Cie. And he was a long while comparing the two black velvet dresses it contained, in order to make sure that they were precisely similar. However, he was eventually persuaded that no one could detect any difference in them unless after looking into their details very closely; in short, that they were as much alike as it is possible for any two things to be which are fashioned by the human hand.

Feeling, therefore, that the dressmaker had well

earned her reward, he wrapped two hundred-mark notes in a blank sheet of paper and put them into an envelope, which he forthwith directed to Fräulein Fuchs, so that he might have it ready to post next day. For he could not spare the time to go out again that afternoon, and, simple as it seemed, this was a matter which he preferred to do himself. His next task was to refold the dresses in the tissue paper with which they had been carefully covered. Then, after locking one of them up in an empty drawer of Dr. Meissener's bureau, he placed the other back in the box. When he had packed this in its original wrapper and corded it, he unlocked his door and went into the surgery, taking the parcel with him.

Ahmed put the box down on a chair as he hurried through the room, a glance at his watch having warned him that it was high time for his promised visit to the end ward. It had already grown dusk, and he found Marie sitting in her usual place by the stove, apparently lost in thought.

"Fräulein told me you would come back," she said, with an accent of reproach. "But I had begun to think that she must be mistaken."

"No," replied Ahmed, in a cheerful tone; "Fräulein Finke was right. I said that I would return, and here I am. I have brought something with me too, something for some one who is in a good temper."

"What is it? Show it to me quickly."

"Here it is," he said, handing her the small packet he had bought in the town. "But you won't be able to see it."

"I asked Fräulein not to light the lamp for a little

while," explained Marie. "I wanted to sit and think about what I have been reading," she added, pointing to the book by her side. "It is all so wonderful; but is it real? Are there people like that, people who have everything any one could wish for?"

"Oh yes," Ahmed answered, smiling under cover of the darkness. "There are a few, a very few, who have everything."

"How happy they must be, and how good!"

"They ought to be; yet — it is nice to read about them, though, isn't it?"

"Very nice, but nicer still to be one of them. I should be quite happy and quite — good," she said, with a sudden change of manner, "if I were rich."

"Well, who knows, Mariska, perhaps you will be one day."

"Ah, if that could only come true!" she exclaimed, in an ecstasy at the prospect he seemed to hold out to her.

"How can it?" thought Fräulein Finke as she trimmed the lamp. "And was it not wrong of the doctor to fill this woman with such hopes, when it might even be to-morrow that they would come to wake her for the last time."

Ahmed had meanwhile been watching her and the mechanism of the oil lamp she was lighting. He noticed that if the wick were turned a little too high it flared considerably, causing a tongue of flame to shoot up above the chimney. But his attention was soon diverted from the lamp by Marie's cry of rapture when she discovered that the packet he had given her contained something to wear. It was only a long narrow

strip of gauze with a fancy border; still it pleased her as a new toy, however cheap, pleases a child.

"How kind of you to bring me this," she said. "I'll put it on at once." In another moment she was standing before the glass, tying the thing round her neck. And no sooner had she arranged it to her satisfaction than she insisted upon knowing what Fräulein Finke thought of the effect. This the attendant declared to be most becoming, and especially suited to the way in which she had done her hair.

"I'm so glad you like it," replied Marie, running her fingers through the long ends of the flimsy stuff that fell in a graceful curve from the throat. She then turned quickly to Ahmed with a smile of gratitude, and said, "Dyakŭou Vam, Doktor."

Her unconscious lapse into the dialect of Little Russia gave the doctor an excuse to continue their conversation in that language, which he had not used hitherto for fear of offending Fräulein Finke, and possibly arousing her suspicions. But even now, he made a gesture of apology to her before answering Marie.

"This trifle is not worthy of your thoughts, my turtledove! But I have something much prettier for you to wear."

"And when may I have it?"

"I can't say yet. You must ask Baron von Baltzan's permission first, but without letting him know I suggested it."

"I'll ask him to-morrow morning; and I'll make him believe that I begged you to give me the thing ever so long ago; only you must tell me what it is."

"A black velvet dress."

XVII

WHEN Ahmed rose next day, after six hours' sleep, he was somewhat astonished to receive a verbal message asking him to breakfast with the Governor. Hitherto Baron von Baltzan had studiously avoided him, except in his official capacity as doctor. There must be some reason for this sudden change of front, thought Ahmed, and he had not to wait long before he discovered its origin. For no sooner had he entered the Governor's reception room than he found that another guest had been bidden to the midday meal. A middle-aged man, with close-cropped, iron-grey hair and a swarthy, clean-shaved face, whom von Baltzan introduced as "Father Klein," came forward to shake hands with Ahmed, who knew at once that he had seen him before. After a moment, he realised that this was the priest whom he had nearly run into on his ride back to Oberkarlsdorf. He also had an uncomfortable sensation that the priest recognised him. A moment later the Governor invited them to precede him into the adjoining room. They had been conversing at table some time before von Baltzan alluded to the matter which they had met to discuss, although, from the presence of Father Klein, Ahmed had guessed its nature. At length, however, the Governor began —

"You are not of our faith, I think, doctor?"

"No!" replied he, "my people are traditional followers of Mohammed."

"Nevertheless you can sympathise with our desire to do all things in order," said von Baltzan.

"To bring the consolations of the Church to those about to die," added Father Klein, endeavouring to explain the Governor's official vagueness. Ahmed signified assent by a nod; he preferred to remain silent until there was some advantage to be gained by speaking.

"My friend," said von Baltzan, indicating the priest, "is one of the good fathers from our abbey, and he is sometimes kind enough to say mass here."

"It is my privilege to do so," protested Father Klein, with a deprecatory wave of the hand.

"Well," continued the Governor, "be that as it may, he takes an interest in my black sheep, and he is naturally anxious that the two who are under sentence of death should not die with all their sins unabsolved."

"Even if absolution were impossible," said the priest, "they might at least be prepared to meet their Judge."

"Have you seen either of them?" asked Ahmed.

"Yes," answered Father Klein. "I was taken to see the man by Baron von Baltzan."

"And he behaved badly," added the Governor.

'Yes, it was strange how violent he became," said Father Klein, mournfully. "The man raged against our Church, making use of such horrid blasphemies that I thought it best to leave him. Not that I fear coarse words myself, but because I did not wish to bring further punishment on his head."

"Possibly the fellow was drunk! He seems to have

been in funds of late," said von Baltzan, with a shrewd glance at the doctor.

"It is a deplorable state of things," said the priest.

"Perhaps it is," replied von Baltzan, not without a trace of resentment at the other's tone. "However, I do not know that this was so," he continued. "But, no matter what made him so furious, after such an outbreak I hesitated to risk a similar demonstration on the part of his accomplice. That is why," he added with a suspicion of malice, "I refused to take you to this woman before I had consulted the doctor."

"You did well, Herr Baron," said Ahmed.

"Why?" asked the priest, lifting his black eyebrows.

"Because," answered the young man calmly, "she, too, is infected with this same bias against your sacred office, Father Klein. Probably she derives it from her association with this man; but it is too much of the nature of a fixed idea for us to hope that it could be speedily eradicated. I know this from what has repeatedly fallen from her lips. You have not heard, perhaps, that we have had great trouble with this woman on account of her mental condition, but I assure you that even now it gives me considerable anxiety."

"Yes," said the Governor, "if it had not been for our friend here we should have had a raving lunatic on our hands. Although for some reason the poor creature was held to be sane at her trial."

"For want of sufficient evidence," said Ahmed; "yet I did my best to convince the judges that she was not responsible."

"If that is the case, she should be pardoned," said the priest in a tone of sympathy.

"No doubt," replied Ahmed; "but our efforts to secure a pardon have also failed. All we have been able to obtain is permission to put her out of this world in the most merciful manner possible."

"By the authority of his Royal Highness the Grand Duke," explained von Baltzan.

"In order to do that," added Ahmed, "it is essential she should not know that the hour of execution is drawing close. It will be — ?" he asked, turning to the Governor.

"In three days," von Baltzan answered, "at seven o'clock in the morning; the executioner will arrive here to-morrow as soon as it is dark."

"Then," said Ahmed, solemnly, "unless you wish him to behead a madwoman, she must be told nothing until the morning of the next day. By that time I can promise she will be unconscious; but only on condition that nothing occurs to disturb her mental equilibrium meanwhile. If it does, if you decide to awaken fears, which I have with difficulty banished from her mind, I will not answer for the consequences."

"By Heaven, he is right!" shouted von Baltzan, rising from the table, at which they had sat long after the meal was finished.

"From his point of view, perhaps," said the priest; "but to let this woman die unrepentant is to kill the soul along with the body."

"The woman is an infidel," said the Governor; "I can answer for that myself; a beautiful creature, but without even an elementary knowledge of right and wrong."

"Still, if she belongs to our Church," said Father Klein, "it is my duty ——!"

"She does not," answered Ahmed; "her mother was a Russian, of gipsy blood, and her father a Sclavok pedlar from Hungary. Neither of them belonged to the orthodox religion; nor was their daughter baptized."

"But she might be received into our Church even now," argued the priest.

"Not unless she consented," said von Baltzan, "and he has told you she never would consent."

"I would like to convince myself of that," the priest answered.

"And I would like to give you the opportunity of doing so, my father," replied the Governor. "Only I cannot take such a responsibility upon myself, after what Dr. Ahmed has said."

"You would rather take the more terrible responsibility of sending her to eternal torment?"

"Yes!"

"Baron von Baltzan!"

"Father Klein, you know that, although a man of the world, I am a faithful son of the Church. Yet in this case I must obey my own conscience, and it tells me that I should do wrong if I did not leave this woman to die in peace."

"That is what I wish to render possible."

"But it cannot be in the way you wish. No! Let her stand before the judgment-seat, with the children who are unbaptized!"

Father Klein recognised that it was of no use to insist beyond a certain point. Therefore, on seeing that the Governor's mind was finally made up, he bowed

his head in tacit agreement. Ahmed had retired to the farther end of the room while these two argued the question out, but now that they had apparently come to an understanding he rejoined them, and at once gathered what their decision had been from Father Klein's downcast expression. And as the priest took his leave, he followed close behind him, but von Baltzan, who had accompanied them to the door, detained the doctor for a moment, when Father Klein had bowed himself out.

"I am thoroughly convinced that your view is correct," he said. "All the same it's dangerous to interfere with the Church. Indeed, I might have hesitated had I not been sure of your support, if any question of my conduct arises."

"I shall be glad to repeat what I have said to the Grand Duke."

"It should not be necessary, still if it is —!" exclaimed von Baltzan, snapping his fingers defiantly. Then, with a start, as though suddenly remembering the fact, he added, in a confidential tone, "Oh, by the way, Marie spoke to me about some dress she had bothered you to get for her. Black velvet, eh! A curious fancy; but we can do no harm by humouring it. Has the thing arrived?"

"Yes; it is in a box upstairs in my surgery."

"Then we might give it to her at once. I could do that myself, if you can't spare the time."

"If you would be so kind, Herr Baron."

"With pleasure! I'll send my servant for it this minute."

"My best thanks."

"No, it is for me to thank you, doctor; I am obliged

to you for taking such care of this poor creature, and" — he continued, sinking his voice into a whisper — "as to your other patient, who is to be nameless, I trust that all is well?"

"As well as can be expected."

"Ah! — Good-bye, my friend."

They thereupon cordially grasped each other by the hand, and Ahmed hurried away through the courtyard in the direction taken by Father Klein. Luckily the priest was still in sight when Ahmed emerged from the outer gate. He had halted for a little while on the castle heights, pausing to look down at the joyous throng on the ice in the flooded meadows below, and he seemed to be participating, with the keenest delight, in their sport. So that the doctor, who had studied Father Klein's face as he drew near to him, thought, "This is, after all, a man to be trusted: a good man." And it was not until Ahmed had come quite close to him that the priest noticed his presence. Then turning towards him, he exclaimed, "Ah, my friend, we meet again! For the third time, eh?"

"I was on my way to the town when I saw your Reverence," said Ahmed, who was by no means surprised at the allusion to their first meeting in the Klostergasse.

"And you stopped to speak to me! I am pleased you did."

"So am I, sir; and I am glad to find you do not regard me as an enemy."

"We count no one that," said the priest, with a certain benign solemnity. "Our task is to make all men our friends."

"Then, if I, an unbeliever, were to ask you a favour, you would grant it?"

"Certainly I would, if it were in my power."

"I think it should be."

"Then let me hear what it is."

"Nothing that directly concerns me," began Ahmed, "but rather some one else, with whom I am concerned. I will try not to speak in riddles; but first I shall have to ask you two or three questions, Father Klein."

"By all means, and I will answer them if I can."

"Thank you," said Ahmed with a bow. "As you know, I am not of your faith; but I have been given to understand that anything told to a priest is kept an inviolable secret."

"If it is told under the seal of confession."

"But if I were to tell you something?"

"Whether I divulged it or not, could only depend upon my private promise."

"You would not pledge yourself beforehand?"

"I should be loath to do so; but in certain circumstances I might."

"Suppose, then, that I were to tell you of a person who was on the point of death, and who desired to see a priest?"

"It would be my duty to go to that person at once."

"But if I could only tell you that the person might die?"

"It would make no difference."

"Well, Father Klein, I know of a person, who may indeed recover, yet is very near death now."

"Take me to this person!" said the priest, with a quick movement towards Ahmed.

"Not till you have given me your word never to reveal anything you may learn in the course of your visit," replied the doctor.

"And if I refuse?"

"I can tell you nothing more."

Father Klein remained silent, looking straight before him, for a little while, during which time Ahmed could gauge the intensity of the conflict going on in his mind, by the nervous twitching of his mouth, and the uneasy shuffling of his feet. At length, however, the priest turned to him again with a set face and said, very deliberately, "So be it! Since I can do nothing without you, I agree to your conditions. I will not mention the fact of my visit to a living soul."

"Nor make any use whatsoever of anything which this person may tell you, that is not under the seal of confession?"

"I agree."

"No matter what may come to your knowledge hereafter?"

"I have given my word."

"And I accept it, without reserve."

"Good! But now, let me know when I can see this person."

"To-night."

"No sooner than that?"

"Impossible! You must not, if you please, be at the prison before the lights are turned out. Ask for Herr Holtzmann; he will conduct you to the infirmary, where you will find me waiting for you."

"I shall be there at a few minutes past eight o'clock, bringing what is needed myself."

With a slight bend of the head, Father Klein then started to go on his way; however, on seeing that Ahmed made a move in the same direction, he dropped into step with him, and they walked down the road together. But the priest, who felt that his companion might interpret silence as hostility, tactfully reopened the conversation.

"You are a native of India, I fancy?" he said.

"Of Eastern Afghanistan," replied Ahmed.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the priest, "a grand country; I have never met elsewhere with such magnificent mountain scenery as in the Hindoo Koosh, nor heard such wild music as that of your hill-men."

"You have been there then?"

"Oh yes — I have travelled about a good deal in my time. We have missions all over the world, and I have made more than one journey through Central Asia."

"Really!" said Ahmed, staring with amazement at the placid countenance of the man by his side.

"I have friends in your country, too," continued the priest, "members of our Society, and they still write to me sometimes. I had a letter from one of them only the other day."

"What did he say?" asked the doctor; "did he give you any news?"

"Yes; he told me that, though we made few converts, our instruction classes were well attended, and he spoke of the favour shown to us by the reigning prince, a man of very liberal views, whom, I regret to say, he reported to be failing in health."

"There was nothing of that in the last letter I received, said Ahmed.

"Such a thing may not be mentioned among his own people, perhaps, any more than the scandal created by his son."

"His son?" Ahmed echoed.

"Nasrullah Khan, his appointed successor. My friend writes that he has the gravest misgivings as to what may happen when this unprincipled young man reigns in the place of his enlightened father. It is indeed very doubtful whether he will be able to restrain the fanaticism of the Mullahs against the teachers of an alien faith. For they are but too likely to blame the influence of our people for his own shortcomings, which are especially abhorrent from the standpoint of your co-religionists."

"How so?" asked Ahmed.

"He has, it seems, acquired a taste for strong liquors from the Russian officers, with whom he loves to play cards; and, being unseasoned to such excess, he must inevitably drink himself to death, before long."

"Well," said Ahmed, frowning darkly, "the sooner the better."

"You hate him so much that you wish him dead?" the priest asked, in a horrified tone.

"Why not? — he has twice tried to kill me."

"For what possible motive?"

"Because I am his brother, and he feared that I might one day take his place."

"Then you are the prince whom my friend speaks of as studying at Petersburg?"

"Yes; but I left Russia a long while ago," replied Ahmed. "I have not had much time for letter-writing; besides, to whom should I write, except my father?

And he is no great writer of letters himself, though I had one from him the other day, which was rather difficult to answer — he wants me to go back!"

"And *you?* Have you no wish to return?"

"I will not say that. But I have no wish to do so while Nasrullah lives."

"Why?"

"Because if I did it would be a question of my life or his. There is not room for both of us on the steps of my father's throne."

"Ah!" exclaimed the priest, "in that case, no doubt, you do well to remain away."

"Yes," said Ahmed, slowly, "I think it best."

They had arrived at the corner of the Klostergasse, and Father Klein said, pointing to the carved stone gate of the chapter-house, "Our ways part here. Strange, that I of all men in this country should have met you, Prince Ahmed."

"Yes, it seems so to us, Father Klein; but doubtless it was written that we should meet."

"I am not fatalist enough to believe that," replied the priest; "but, since it has happened, I am quite sure that our meeting will serve some unseen purpose of Him who set us here."

"It may well be!" said Ahmed.

"Until to-night, then, good-bye."

The young man stood for some time gazing after the retreating figure of Father Klein, and only when it had disappeared did his mind revert to the errand that had brought him to the Marks Platz. He then walked over to the principal post-office, and dropped into the letter-box the envelope which he had addressed to

Fräulein Fuchs on the previous day. As he came back across the square he looked up at the windows of Ehrlich's room. How long it now seemed to be since he had consulted him; and what a network of intrigue had spun itself about this woman in the meantime! It should all have been so simple, thought Ahmed, yet who could now say where it might end? He knew that his attempt to save her had already dragged him into deep water; but he had foreseen that it must, and was prepared to struggle out as best he might, or to sink. The mischief would not stop there, however; other lives were involved as well as his, that of the lonely old prince at Wilhelmsbrunn; and that of Elsa, too, perhaps.

On returning to the Castle, Ahmed walked on past the Governor's house to the prison entrance, where he learnt from the big door-keeper that Herr Holtzmann was in his room; and there sure enough he discovered him, indulging in an after-dinner nap. However, the affable chief warder neither resented the intrusion, nor made any difficulty about admitting Father Klein that evening. And on being asked if it would be necessary to consult von Baltzan first, or obtain his sanction afterwards, he replied with a smile, "Neither! The Herr Baron generally goes to the cavalry casino about eight o'clock, leaving me in command, and I will bring his Reverence up to you, on my own authority."

"I am much obliged to you, Herr Holtzmann," said the doctor, who had heard of the Governor's nightly visits to his ex-comrades, and had calculated on his absence when fixing the hour at which the priest was to come.

"But, of course, I do not want to get you into trouble," he added.

"You need not be afraid, Herr Doctor!" answered the other, laughing outright. "Baron von Baltzan will ask me no questions, nor shall I ask him any. And please do not talk about being obliged. It's the least I could do, after all your kindness to me."

With the comfortable feeling of having managed a delicate affair rather well, Ahmed let himself into the infirmary and went at once to the end ward. There he found that Marie was in a flutter of excitement about the beautiful black dress which the Governor had handed to her, with such a flourish that she had come to look upon it as his gift. But as the doctor desired nothing more than that von Baltzan himself should share this illusion with her, he made no effort to disabuse her mind. And, having said that her thanks were due only to the Governor, he turned her attention from the dress to another matter, in which she was almost equally interested, by an adroit compliment upon the way she had done her hair. Marie confessed that she was very gratified he had noticed it, because she had given herself a great deal of trouble over it that day, in order to please him. Besides Fräulein Finke had been so kind as to help her, with the assistance of a picture in the book he had brought her. "She did that for your sake, doctor," said Marie, archly; "it seems that Fräulein has taken quite a fancy to you." At this indiscreet utterance the attendant became crimson, and Ahmed, while pretending not to be conscious of her embarrassment, took advantage of it to approach quite close to Marie. He then ran his fingers lightly

over her head and down her arms, unobserved by Fräulein Finke, who on the recovery of her self-possession only noticed that Marie appeared suddenly to have grown so drowsy that she could hardly keep her eyes open.

"The excitement has proved too much for her," said Ahmed, pointing to the condemned woman, who had sunk into her accustomed place by the stove.

"Poor thing," exclaimed the attendant in a tone of sympathy.

"She'll drop off to sleep directly," said the doctor; "in fact I doubt if she's awake now. See if she pays any attention to me when I speak to her in her own language."

"Moya Gorlitschko," he began, talking to Marie in the Cossack dialect, "you hear me, though you make no sign, but by-and-by you will obey. You are to sleep on in that chair until the clock out there strikes eleven. Then you are to get up quickly, walk to the table, and reach across it for your book."

While he was saying this, Fräulein Finke had watched Marie closely, but without seeing any look of comprehension come into her face. Turning away from Marie, and picking up a book that she had let fall on the ground, Ahmed said to the attendant, "She will soon be fast asleep." He then moved with silent tread towards the door, putting the book down on the opposite side of the unlighted lamp as he passed the table.

"Sleep is the best thing for her," he whispered, opening the door. "Please tell Frau Schmidt not to disturb her."

XVIII

At six o'clock that evening when Ahmed came to relieve Elsa he fancied that she showed more signs of fatigue than usual, and was at a loss how to account for the fact, since she had only been on duty for twelve hours. However, she assured him that she felt quite herself; but admitted that she was not easy in her mind about the Countess. So that it was with no slight misgiving about Elsa's own health that Ahmed bade her good-night, having first insisted that she should not return until noon next day, and that she should get some fresh air in the meantime. He charged her also not to be over anxious about the patient, although he did not dare to tell her that there was no danger, because Countess Lichtenthal's increasing weakness had been all too evident during the last few days. And as soon as he was left to himself he began to think out what measures must be taken to restore this woman's ebbing vitality. There could be no question that the possibility of reviving it by a profusion of salt water had long ceased to exist. The doctor must, therefore, rely on the effect of certain powerful stimulants, which, of course, being transitory, would only be used as a last resource. Of these restoratives he expected the best result from oxygen, but he had left the heavy iron cylinder and elaborate inhaler in the surgery, as he did

not intend to administer the gas that evening, or, at any rate, not until after Father Klein's visit.

Having made a careful examination of his patient Ahmed sat down to write his report to the Grand Duke. Yet, although he knew the case to be desperate, he said nothing in it which pointed to a fatal termination. Nevertheless his words contained a warning of another kind, which was sufficiently alarming, though it might well escape the notice of one who was too distracted with grief to care about anything except the fact that they gave him hope. But if, in place of the sorrow-stricken husband, Weigand had read this bulletin, he would have at once seen in it a sinister hint that the patient's brain would be permanently affected. His report despatched, Ahmed sat down by the bedside to watch the Countess, and listened attentively for any words she might speak. But for a long while she uttered no articulate sound. Ahmed had observed that as the delirium grew less acute her thoughts became more and more centred in the character with which she now appeared to have almost completely identified herself; so much so, indeed, that he doubted whether she had any distinct consciousness of her own personality. Still he was by no means sure that the priest might not awaken in her this dormant sense. He would not, therefore, have risked the possible ill effects of bringing her in contact with so disturbing an influence as Father Klein might prove to be, had it not been for certain words which Countess Lichtenthal had let fall on more than one occasion. And, although he had recognised them as those in which Schiller makes the unhappy Queen implore to be allowed the

benefit of the sacrament, there was something so apposite in the passage to her own situation that he had felt they must have been repeated with special intent. Not having the heart to turn a deaf ear to her prayer, he had been casting about for some means of gratifying her implied desire, when he met Father Klein by accident, as it seemed. Ahmed glanced at his watch and saw that the time for the priest's visit was drawing near. He felt somewhat disappointed at not having heard a repetition of the words which had caused him to summon this spiritual aid to the Countess's bedside, but reflected that perhaps it was best after all she should not realise the need in which she stood of these last consolations of her Church.

Having done everything to make the patient as presentable as possible, in spite of her disfiguring bandages, Ahmed left her dozing, while he took up his position outside the door. Standing there, in the silence of the prison, he heard the hour strike in the abbey tower, and for a few minutes he waited for another sound of a less harmonious nature, beginning to wonder, after a while, whether the priest would fail him. At length, however, the iron door grated on its hinges, as it was slowly opened by Herr Holtzmann, who carried a lamp in his hand, in order to light his companion through the building which had already been plunged into darkness.

Ahmed promised to bring Father Klein back to the chief warder's room, when the time came for him to leave. Then, having led the priest to the ward in which the sick woman was lying, he left him to perform

his sacred office alone, after telling him that he would be close by and would come immediately on being called. The doctor found plenty to do in the surgery; indeed he was still busy among his apparatus, when he heard some one calling him by name, and was surprised to discover from a glance at the surgery clock that nearly two hours had passed. Ahmed at once hastened to rejoin Father Klein, who stood waiting for him outside the door of the ward. With an apology to the priest for detaining him yet another moment, he went into the room to see how his patient had borne this long visit; but, on finding that the Countess was in much the same condition as before, he came out again almost immediately. And after he had carefully turned the key behind him, he conducted Father Klein down the corridor towards the prison. When they reached the low iron wicket, the priest stopped and silently indicated by raising his right hand with the forefinger uplifted that he had something to say. This commanding gesture caused Ahmed to come to a halt, with his hand on the door.

"How long have you known that this woman was dying?" he asked.

"I do not know she is that now!" answered the doctor.

"Oh yes, you do. I can see it, and your eyes are more skilled to detect the signs which herald death than mine."

"You forget that the resources of modern medicine are practically unlimited."

"For prolonging life, perhaps, not for recreating it. The woman is in a moribund state; you may keep her

alive for a few days more, but, as far as this world is concerned, she is already dead."

"Well, even so?"

"Why, then, did you tell me that her recovery was possible?"

"Suppose it should occur?"

"That would be to suppose a miracle."

"Such things have happened."

"In an age of belief; not in these days of mammon-worship and broken vows! But admitting that you had some vague hope she might be restored to health, why was I not sent for sooner?"

"I did not feel sure till last night that she wished to see a priest."

"Is that the kind of excuse you would make to one of your own colleagues? Would you wait to ascertain whether the patient wanted to see another doctor, if you were yourself in doubt?"

"Father Klein," answered the doctor, speaking in a slow, deliberate manner, "I cannot be expected to decide with the same promptness in matters which I do not comprehend, as in those which come within my own province. But you may take it that I have done the best I could according to my lights. And please remember that I need not have summoned you here, even now."

"I am scarcely likely to forget that," said the priest, "when you have this day refused to consent to my visiting a woman who is about to die."

"In that, also, I would have you believe that I acted for the best."

"According to your lights, perhaps."

"Which enable me to form a judgment on all the facts."

"You mean that there are some facts that you have kept back?"

"Possibly! Though I admit nothing."

"You have taken a grave responsibility upon yourself, Dr. Ahmed. And if the eternal welfare of any one has been imperiled by what you have done to-day, you will surely have to answer for it hereafter."

"I shall be ready to justify my actions when the time comes."

"Even if you should be called to account in this world?"

"Yes."

"Then on your own head be it!" replied the priest, in a tone of warning. "Whatever happens I shall not break my promise, nor use the knowledge I have gained this night for any purpose, save only in the service of Him to whom all things are known."

Having delivered himself of this solemn admonition, Father Klein permitted the doctor to lead him down the dark gallery to Herr Holtzmann's room, whence the chief warder was to conduct him out of the prison. As soon as Ahmed had placed the priest in Holtzmann's charge and expressed his gratitude to him for coming, he returned to his patient, whom he had been loath to leave so long alone. There was, however, something that for the moment weighed more on his mind than the ill effects which this visit might possibly have on the Countess; so that even when he had assured himself that her condition gave no cause for immediate alarm, he appeared none the less anxious and alert.

Indeed as he sat in the darkened room with bent brows and wide-open staring eyes he was, for the time being, unconscious of the sick woman. He had remained in the same cramped position leaning forward in his chair, and grasping its arms tightly with both hands, for almost an hour, when the sound of a female voice crying for help reached him. In an instant he had started to his feet and was at the door. Down the passage came Frau Schmidt running towards him, with an expression of horror in her white face.

"What is the matter?" asked Ahmed, as he went to meet her.

"She has burnt herself," gasped the frightened woman, "terribly."

"All right," said he; "I'll come to her at once. In the meanwhile go back and keep her as quiet as you can."

The attendant did as she was told, and in an incredibly short space of time Ahmed entered the end ward with a bundle of bandages, a big bottle, and a morocco-leather case in his hand. He found Marie seated on a stool, her head buried in her hands, rocking herself to and fro, and uttering a low continuous moaning cry of pain. While Frau Schmidt, who had grown somewhat calmer under the influence of Ahmed's perfect self-possession, tried in a breathless way to tell him how the thing had happened, he opened his case and rapidly prepared a solution of morphia, which he injected into Marie's arm. Whereupon her agonised movements soon ceased and she gradually became quite quiet. In the meantime the doctor had lifted her up and laid her gently down on the bed. He then

proceeded to examine her injuries, and was greatly relieved to find that they were of a trifling nature.

It seemed that a few minutes before the accident occurred the prisoner had been sound asleep, and that she must have risen up all of a sudden, walked over to the table, and leant deliberately across the lighted lamp. Before Frau Schmidt was aware that she had got up, Marie's gauze scarf had been in a blaze; and it was a mercy her hair had not been set on fire too: nothing but the way in which she now wore it piled up on the top of her head could have prevented that from happening. However, the good woman had acted promptly enough once the mischief was done. For dipping a sponge in water she had extinguished the flames before they had time to spread, though meanwhile the flimsy gauze wrap had been reduced to tinder.

The doctor had listened to her explanations with a perfectly grave countenance, but an inward feeling of amusement, as he went about his task of dressing the burns, and binding up Marie's neck in innumerable coils of surgical gauze. When he had finished this he turned to the attendant, and said in an extremely sympathetic tone —

"I am afraid you find this night work rather trying, Frau Schmidt."

"Well, sir," she answered wearily, "I do feel it a little more than I used. But, of course, when one's turn comes for duty at night one is still able to take it."

"Only you have a sense of fatigue at times?" asked Ahmed, with the same persuasive note of compassionate interest. "You are almost inclined, every now and then, to shut your eyes?"

"Yes, doctor; it is difficult to keep them open always."

"Exactly! Just now, for instance, when our friend was so unfortunate as to set herself on fire, you had closed them, eh?"

"To tell the truth, I think I must have, though I can't remember how long."

"Of course not," said Ahmed; "you lost consciousness for the moment, that was all, no doubt."

"Yes," answered the woman, guiltily, "it couldn't have been more than a minute or two."

"No, no! Nevertheless this accident happened in the meantime."

"It did; but you won't tell any one that I was dozing, will you, doctor?"

"Why should I? It's no affair of mine."

"Couldn't you give me something to keep me awake?"

"Oh, I don't think you'll go to sleep again to-night, Frau Schmidt."

"No, indeed, I have had too much of a shock for that; but to-morrow night, sir."

"Well, I will see what I can do."

"I should be so thankful if you would."

"Very good; I'll try to make up something; and now I must be going. If you let her rest," he added, "she may to a certain extent sleep off the pain, and I will come to see how she is early in the morning."

As soon as the door had closed behind him, Ahmed smiled at the thought how readily the woman had taken up his suggestion, and how utterly unconscious she was that she had not made this request of her own free will.

And as he watched through the long night by the bedside of the Countess his mind was busy on the scheme he had prepared with such infinite forethought. No step had been taken hastily, no detail neglected; every chance had been considered, every risk provided against with the same care, whether great or small, so that Ahmed felt that nothing now could happen to interfere with his calculations; he could see no combination that would defeat him, except a sudden change of attitude in the free-agents on whom he was dependent for success. And of these, none were the least likely to play him false. Elsa was of course absolutely sure, her obedience had always been unquestioning; the Grand Duke also was to be trusted, he had given his word, and he would not think of breaking it; Father Klein, too, even if he had a suspicion of anything being wrong, was pledged to secrecy; Baron von Baltzan showed no sign of opposition; and, for the rest, if one of them had the wish to make difficulties he would not have the power.

Towards daybreak the doctor noticed that his patient's breathing was more troubled; and he hastened to set up his apparatus for the inhalation of oxygen. And when Elsa returned to the ward at noon she found that Ahmed's words had been borne out; for there was a marked, if not great, improvement in the condition of the Countess. It was, therefore, in a far less despondent frame of mind that the nurse went about her work during the day and up till eight o'clock, at which hour Ahmed came to take her place.

Having seen that Marie's burn had not caused her any great discomfort, as her attention was turned again

to the black velvet dress which she had put on for the first time that day, and having given Frau Schmidt a bottle of stuff that would keep the good woman awake for at least twenty hours, he decided not to let Elsa remain on duty any longer. Contrary to his expectation, she did not rebel against this order, but left the ward directly she had given him an account of the patient's progress since noon. On the way towards her room Elsa met the Governor, who was coming down the corridor followed by a tall, gaunt, grey figure, which in the imperfect light seemed more like an exaggeration of his own shadow than that of another person.

Von Baltzan for once, however, did not appear pleased at seeing the nurse with the copper-gold hair to whom he was always so polite. He looked, she thought, a trifle shamefaced and ill at ease, as though he had been detected in some dishonourable action, which he was endeavouring awkwardly to conceal. His companion in grey, who was evidently of a retiring disposition, had placed himself on the farther side of the Governor; so that Elsa only caught a glimpse of a ragged red beard and a pair of watchful ferret-like eyes. Von Baltzan went straight on down the passage, past the end ward, till he came to a door facing him, which Elsa never remembered to have seen open. There, after fumbling about for a little while with a big bunch of keys, the Governor managed to find the right one. But even when they had turned the key in the lock, their combined efforts were required to push the heavy door open, and it only then yielded with a terrible rasping of its rusty hinges, the sound of which made Elsa shiver. For with the stealthy opening of that door

the certainty had come to her that this man in grey was no other than he who would carry out the sentence of death.

She understood then why von Baltzan had been so averse from speaking to her; no doubt he feared that the mere sight of the man would make a painful impression on her if she were to guess his errand, since even the knowledge of his presence in the prison must be a shock to her.

Elsa was grateful to the Governor for his thoughtfulness, yet for the moment she could not realise all that the coming of this man meant. So entirely did the Countess occupy her thoughts, that everything which happened outside the sick-room seemed far off and unreal; and in spite of her meeting with the executioner, her sleep that night was unbroken and dreamless. Meanwhile Ahmed had passed many anxious hours with his patient, whose life-stream was gradually ebbing, notwithstanding the constant administration of oxygen. The Countess had not uttered a syllable since the visit of Father Klein in Ahmed's hearing, and he felt sure, therefore, that she could scarcely have spoken of it to the nurse during his absence. But even so, Elsa must be alarmed by the woman's death-like look unless he could restore her to some semblance of vitality before the morning. To do that was no easy task, as any over-stimulation of the nerves might stop the already feeble action of her heart. However, he contrived, by means of a draught made up of powerful drugs in minute quantities, to bring back the appearance of life, if not health, to Countess Lichtenthal's pallid face. So that when Elsa came at eight o'clock,

although she saw that the improvement of yesterday had not been maintained, she was not aware how low the vital forces of the patient had fallen. Nevertheless, as the nurse turned to Ahmed with an expression of increased anxiety for guidance, he told her to call him at once should the patient's pulse suddenly grow weaker, and added that he would, in any case, look in during the day.

Faithful to his promise, Ahmed came to see the Countess at two o'clock that afternoon and again at five. But on neither occasion did he find any marked change in her, though it was evident to him that her power of rallying had been exhausted. Not long after his second visit, Elsa heard a light tap at the door. On opening it she discovered Fräulein Finke, who explained that she had been sent by the doctor for a bottle, but had failed to find it in the surgery. She had thought that Elsa might possibly know where it was. The nurse was obliged to admit, however, that she had not seen any bottle answering to the description of the one Fräulein Finke had come in search of.

"I am sorry I can't help you," said Elsa, apologetically.

"Oh, it's my fault," replied her friend, "I certainly thought the doctor said it was on the table. He wants the stuff for a dressing, so I'd best hurry back."

"Have you had an accident?" asked Elsa, her curiosity excited by the fact that Ahmed had made no mention of one.

"Yes," answered the attendant, quickly. "Marie managed to burn herself the night before last, about

the neck mostly. Doctor is bandaging it. I must be off. Good-bye!"

The girl then ran away down the corridor; but Elsa stood still for some time, looking straight in front of her as though she had been deprived of the ability to move. At length she turned and went slowly back into the room. Walking over to her chair, Elsa sank into it in a limp, helpless fashion. She felt that repose alone would enable her to think, and that it was imperative she should at once think out her course of action. For what Fräulein Finke had told her had started a long train of ideas; but as yet Elsa could not see to what conclusion they were leading her. She wanted time to reflect, if her judgment were not to be swept away by the wave of doubt that had broken upon her of a sudden. Above all, she must be careful not to harbour, without ground, suspicion against one whose good faith she had hitherto relied on so implicitly. True, this was not the first time that doubts had arisen in her mind; but knowing how an atmosphere of doubt breeds treachery, Elsa would have even now banished every shadow of suspicion from her thoughts if she could; but, much as she wished to do so, it was no longer possible. The news of this accident to the prisoner, which made it necessary that her throat should be bandaged in a similar manner to the Countess's, reminded Elsa of the close resemblance that these women bore to one another. A strange coincidence, and rendered all the stranger by Ahmed's having spoken to her neither of the likeness, nor of the accident. She asked herself whether he might not also be keeping his own counsel in other matters. Had he,

for instance, told her his true opinion about the patient's chance of recovery? These and many other questions of an equally unanswerable character Elsa pondered over as she sat watching by the bedside.

Meanwhile, when Fräulein Finke returned the doctor had already found the bottle he wanted in the very place where he had left it, wrapped up with the other things, though he declared that he distinctly remembered having taken it back to the surgery. Marie's throat also was again neatly bandaged, so that the attendant had no opportunity of judging herself of the nature of the burn, though she did not think it could be very bad, from the fact that the doctor spent such a little time over it. She was not, therefore, surprised to observe that the condemned woman had fallen into a somnolent state under the soothing influence of the doctor. Indeed, since she had heard certain mysterious footsteps coming and going in the direction of the disused door, she was glad that Marie should remain in ignorance of what was being prepared behind it. For word had gone round among the attendants that a stranger had arrived, and they guessed that the prisoners would be executed on the following day.

Leaving Marie apparently lost in contemplation of the beauties of her black velvet gown, Ahmed went to seek out his friend Herr Holtzmann, whom he discovered in a state of nervous excitement about the business of next morning.

"You must try not to think about it," said the doctor.

"I do, sir, but it's no good. I can think of nothing else. One may be a gaoler, but one remains a man. If it were only Mnischko, now! That wouldn't be so

bad, perhaps; but the woman too. Heaven! suppose she goes into a fit of hysterics!"

"I'll answer for it that she won't."

"Well, I'm half afraid I might break down myself if she did. I can't bear to see a woman cry, doctor. My heart ought to have been hardened by the years I've spent in this place, and I dare say it has been, but not enough for me to look calmly on such a sight."

Ahmed hastened to inform the chief warder that his feelings were shared by Baron von Baltzan, and that it had been agreed upon to place Marie under the influence of a drug which would make her unconscious of her surroundings. It would necessitate her movements being directed by some one, probably the doctor himself, but it would spare them the painful spectacle of a violent emotional outburst on the part of the terrified woman, that must otherwise have been inevitable. Holtzmann, on hearing this, expressed the liveliest satisfaction, and declared that he could now face the ordeal of the morning with equanimity. For Mnischko, he was convinced, would meet his fate with composure. "He is no coward, that man," said the warder, "and, thanks to your generosity, doctor, he has been able to keep his courage up. You may depend upon it, that he'll walk with a firm step when the hour comes for them to lead him out."

So far Ahmed had avoided an encounter with Mnischko, and, for the man's own sake, he was careful to arrange now that he should not be present at his execution, but that the chief warder should summon him only when it was over, in order that he might certify the death in due form. The other execution

would follow, and in it he would accompany the condemned woman to the place, and remain with her until the end. Having settled these all-important points, the doctor took leave of Holtzmann, who told him that he should not have believed it possible that he could go about his preparations with so little apprehension.

Ahmed, however, was very far from sharing the chief warder's assurance that there was nothing now to fear. As he walked back to his surgery the thought of the numerous preparations which he also had to make occupied his mind. And, perhaps for the first time, he realised how a single false step would undo all that he had done. But once again he told himself that, as far as things depended upon him, success was certain; moreover, that no matter what danger threatened, he would go calmly on to the end. While meditating thus, the doctor was busily employed mixing various drugs and extracts together, stopping every now and then to glance at a manuscript book. When he had finished doing this, he looked at his watch and saw that it was already past seven. Then, having put one of the little phials he had just filled into his pocket, he went to the end ward. Marie was still leaning back in her chair with her hands folded upon her lap, and Frau Schmidt volunteered the information that she had found her in the same attitude when she had come on duty at six o'clock. The good woman also, while thanking Ahmed for the stuff he had given her on the previous evening, complained that she had scarcely been able to close her eyes all day. Consequently she feared that she might drop off to sleep during the night. Ahmed expressed surprise, on hearing that the effect

of the drug had lasted so long, but, at the same time, assured her that it would not act so powerfully if she should have recourse to it again. "Yes," said the attendant, "I suppose I had better take the stuff; it wouldn't do for me to be found asleep to-morrow morning."

"Ah, I thought you might want another dose, Frau Schmidt, so I've brought one with me," said Ahmed, handing her a bottle similar in every respect to the empty one which he had taken from the shelf and dropped into his pocket.

"Thank you, doctor," she said, putting the bottle down beside her. "I shall be glad when it's over," she added, in a whisper; "they tell me this will be the last night!"

"Yes," answered Ahmed, in the same low tone; "you will not have to keep watch again."

"I'm sorry for her, poor creature," said the woman, "but it has to come sooner or later."

"Exactly! But you won't let her see that, you know," said he, pointing to Marie.

"Heaven forbid! Let her sleep in peace if she can, I say."

"And if you feel sleepy yourself, Frau Schmidt, you know what to do?"

"Drink this off," she replied, holding up the bottle. "You can take it in a cup of coffee, if you like."

Going across to the stove, Ahmed bent over Marie and made some trifling readjustment of the bandage round her throat. Then with his back turned to Frau Schmidt, so that she could not see what he was doing, he slowly pressed the half-closed eyelids of the motionless woman down until they were quite shut."

XIX

PUNCTUALLY at eight the doctor entered the room where his patient was lying, but Elsa did not come forward as usual to meet him, and it was some little time before he could distinguish her figure in the shadow by the bedside. She had sat there in the semi-darkness, so that no external object might distract her thoughts from the problem she was turning over in her mind, and so engrossing had these reflections proved that she neither heard the door open, nor saw Ahmed until he was standing close to her. Then she rose quickly and faced him. Something in the pose of her head, as well as in the way she had unconsciously clenched her hands, denoted resolve; and when she spoke it was with an accent of determination that made her voice sound strange.

"I must speak to you alone," she said.

In the half light Ahmed could not see the set expression of her face, but the cold, hard inflection that she had given to the words warned him she was in deadly earnest.

"Very good, if you will wait one moment," he said, kneeling down by the bed, and taking the patient's wrist in his fingers. After counting its scarcely perceptible throb for a little while, the doctor made the sick woman swallow a few drops out of the phial he

had brought with him, then he again felt her pulse, and not till he had observed a slight quickening in the beat did he turn towards Elsa.

"Now," he said quietly, "come into the surgery."

Ahmed led the way there, motioning to Elsa to lock the door of the ward behind her. When he had turned up the lamp which had been left alight in case of emergency, he looked straight at her, and, after a moment's pause, he made a gesture of inquiry, as though anxious to hear what she had to say. But it was evident that the nurse recoiled from speaking, and that Ahmed's dispassionate attitude had exercised a chilling effect upon her. She did not, however, keep him long in doubt as to the seriousness of her purpose.

"That woman in the next room is dying," she said, at last overcoming her hesitation to speak.

"Have you only just found that out?" asked the doctor, with an accent of surprise.

"I have suspected it for some time; but I was not sure until to-day."

"My dear Elsa, it has been a foregone conclusion from the moment that fool of a nun let her see herself in the glass."

"Then why did you persuade her husband to allow you to perform this operation?"

"For reasons which I would rather not go into now, but which still hold good."

"Even though the Countess cannot recover?"

"Yes!"

"You have no hope of saving her?"

"None whatever."

"Then why don't you send for a priest?"

"She has received the sacrament already."

"You knew that the end was near, and yet you gave her husband no hint?"

"It was impossible."

"Because you intend to put another in her place?"

"Yes," answered the doctor, calmly, "that is my intention, unless something occurs to prevent it. I wished to keep you out of this. And even now I should have told you nothing, if I had not required your help."

"My help!" cried Elsa, in a tone of horror. "I will not lift a finger to help you."

"Perhaps you will denounce me?"

"I do not say that!"

"Elsa, what I have to do to-night can be done without your assistance, but to-morrow there is something which cannot. I tried hard to secure the means that would have enabled me to work alone, but when this failed me" — he here indicated the case which held the new anæsthetic — "I saw that it was not to be done."

"You risked your life to find out a way?"

"Well, to some extent, I suppose I did. At any rate, I should have died if it had not been for your watchfulness that night. I have not forgotten what I owe to you, Elsa."

"You will owe me far more if I prevent you from committing a crime now."

"Do you call it a crime to save a life?"

"Yes, if it can only be saved at the cost of another; and worst of all by sacrificing the innocent for the guilty."

"There can be no question of sacrifice. This woman

will be dead in six hours; my difficulty has been to keep her alive so long. She is in a state of coma now, and for some time past she has lived in a world of shadows, without any perception of what was really going on around her."

"But even if Countess Lichtenthal should suffer nothing, it is cruel to impose a criminal upon the man who loves her."

"From a sentimental point of view, yes; but as a matter of actual fact, no. It is the kindest thing one could do, the only thing probably that would give him another hour free from grief."

"Yes," said the nurse, bitterly, "that's it! You blot out the memory of his wife, and in her place you force him to accept what?"

"A very beautiful woman!"

"A very bad one!"

"Not good, perhaps, in the sense that your people use the word when they apply it to a woman."

"Bad, in every sense," said Elsa.

"How so?"

"She helped to kill that man."

"She was *accused* of killing him."

"And proved to have done it."

"Convicted, you mean. But I believe her to be innocent."

"And I believe her guilty."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Then I will tell you why! You have an unreasoning prejudice against the woman; therefore, you would condemn her unheard."

"The woman was tried, and found guilty," insisted Elsa.

"Yes," answered Ahmed, "and even if she were guilty it would make no difference to me."

"Of course not; you are in love with her."

"That is not true, Elsa."

"Why put your life in danger, then, to save hers?"

"Because I have given her my word."

"And you mean to keep it?"

"If it is possible, yes."

"What if I say that you shall not?"

The nurse stood facing him squarely, her eyes fixed on his, and it seemed to Ahmed that she looked taller as she spoke these threatening words. So, the thing he believed impossible had happened; this timid, loving creature had set her will against his; she had ceased to be a passive instrument in his hands, and suddenly become an enemy. He waited a little before answering her question, his forehead drawn down and his eyes almost hidden, as though reflecting on the situation which had come about so unexpectedly; then, speaking in a slow, deliberate manner, but without the smallest trace of fear, he said, "You could stop my doing this if you wished, Elsa, but I cannot see that you would do any good by it. You will not prevent Countess Lichtenthal from dying."

"I shall prevent that woman from usurping her place."

"Yes; but you forget that she will then be put to death."

"No; I forget nothing!"

"Surely you forget that I have promised to save her?"

"If it is possible," said Elsa, quoting his own words.

"If I *live!*" said Ahmed, solemnly.

"You do not mean —?" she cried.

"How could I face her to-morrow, after I had broken that promise?"

"You would be gone!"

"Exactly! I must take flight, of course. I could scarcely stay here to reckon with the Grand Duke, after leading him to suppose that his wife would be restored to perfect physical health in a few weeks. True, he might not survive the shock of finding that she was dead; but even then there are plenty of people who would demand an account of me. No, my dear Elsa, what you have to do is quite simple. Go at once to Baron von Baltzan; he will telegraph to Wilhelmsbrunn; and, if you give the dying woman a few drops from this bottle every two hours, his Royal Highness may be here while she still breathes. Only, I shall not wait to meet him."

"You will leave the prison?"

"Yes," said the young man, with a smile in which contempt for life mingled with a certain sadness at the thought of losing Elsa. "I shall leave! but not by the door; that might be difficult; besides, there are so many easier and shorter ways upon that shelf," he added, pointing to the array of bottles in which his friend Meissener took a justifiable pride.

"You would not kill yourself?" said the nurse, clutching at his sleeve in terror lest he should take up one of those deadly bottles then and there.

"Undoubtedly I should!"

"Oh, but you mustn't, you mustn't!"

"Why not?" he asked, with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"Because it would kill me too," she said, in a low hoarse voice, "and because," she continued, falling on her knees at his feet, "that would mean the death of another."

"Elsa!" he cried, lifting her from the ground and holding her tight in his arms.

For a moment she looked up at him, and he read in the flush that had mounted to her cheeks the confirmation of what she had said. But the next instant her head sank upon his breast, and a storm of sobs shook her whole frame. This was the first and the last time he felt that a conflict of will would arise between them, for from henceforth they were bound together by a living link.

Nevertheless, if in future he must choose for her, he ought at least to be able to satisfy her that he acted according to his conscience, and, so far as his lights went, for the best. Therefore he spoke to her very gently, as one speaks to a frightened child, passing his hand over her hair with a slow soothing movement meanwhile.

"If the thing I am doing is wrong, Elsa, I alone shall be to blame, since you knew nothing of it, until it was too late for me to retrace my steps. Indeed, if some accident had not revealed my plan to you, I should have only told you when it had been accomplished. But it was ordered otherwise, and perhaps it is better you should know beforehand, so that you may be prepared for what must happen were I to fail. Now, if this should be the case, you will disclaim all knowledge

of my attempt, for the sake of that other life which hangs on yours. Remember, too, that in helping me you can harm no one, and you may save a fellow-creature from an ignominious death."

Elsa lifted her eyes to his in mute token of obedience, and, bending down, Ahmed pressed his lips fervently on hers. For a long time neither of them spoke, overcome by the feeling that they might soon be separated from each other for ever. At last the young man broke the silence, saying, "We must go back; there is much to be done."

But before leaving the surgery, he took a parcel wrapped in tissue paper out of the bureau in the adjoining room. He carried this with him into the ward, setting it down carefully on a chair at the bottom of the bed. Then leaning over the dying woman he placed his ear against her side, and found that during the last half-hour her heart-beat had grown feebler. The end was not so far off as he had anticipated; it was indeed only with the utmost difficulty that she could be made to swallow the cordial which he let fall drop by drop on her tongue. And soon the muscles of her throat would refuse to perform their functions even when mechanically stimulated. His first care was therefore to prevent the limbs from becoming rigid, and to do this he injected a small quantity of the extract which, he knew, could be relied on to produce a state of suspended animation. Ahmed had also discovered, from his experiments on animals, that the drug delayed the appearance of *rigor mortis* for ten, or even twenty hours after death. And it could be given with perfect safety as in no case was there any chance of the patient's

recovering. The immediate effect of the injection was to bring a glow of colour back to the dying woman's pallid face; but Ahmed warned Elsa that the improvement was only apparent, and that, though the essence would undoubtedly prolong life, no return to consciousness would occur. He explained the strange hallucination under which the Countess had been for many days, and how he had fostered it in order that her mind might be diverted from the subject of her disfigurement, as well as from the pain her injuries would otherwise have occasioned her. For this reason, if any knowledge of what was happening should filter into her brain, it would fit in with certain preconceived notions that she had cherished of late, and not cause her the least mental distress. It was just possible that she might fancy she was being dressed to play her favourite part; but before the hour came for her to step upon the stage, the curtain would have fallen for the last time. Elsa might rest assured, however, that if the Countess experienced any sensation it would be of a pleasurable nature. But from Ahmed's memory of his own feelings, when under the drug, he was convinced that, after the first few seconds, she would become oblivious of her surroundings, and so remain until the end. Having told Elsa what was necessary, he then left the ward.

The doctor next changed his boots for a pair of thick felt slippers, and after picking up a little blue glass bottle from the surgery table, he walked across the passage to Elsa's room. Striking a match, he looked about him for a moment, and, as soon as he had found the nurse's handbag, he hastily slipped a thick roll of

bank notes into it. "This will be more useful to me, if anything goes wrong to-night," he thought, putting his fingers on the small phial in his breast-pocket. Ahmed, who moved slowly with cat-like tread, halted when he reached the end ward, and, holding his breath, listened intently for some little time. Then he turned away and walked back, as softly as before, towards the other end of the building. There he stood for a while at the top of the staircase which led to the Governor's apartments. Not a sound came up it; no doubt, von Baltzan had, as usual, left the prison at nightfall for the more congenial atmosphere of the officers' casino. "So much the better," he reflected; "the fewer people about, the safer my task! Luckily my friend Herr Holtzmann is not given to prowling about here at any time, and even the stranger from Mittelburg, who has haunted this place all day long, must want a few hours' sleep to-night; it's to be hoped that Mnischko will sleep too."

When Ahmed had made certain that no one was stirring below, he retraced his steps with the same caution to the end ward, slowly opened the door, and glided into the room. He had heard Frau Schmidt's heavy breathing, and guessed that the powerful opiate he had given her had already taken effect; though, had she been still awake, he could easily have made an excuse for this late visit. But the attendant was sound asleep with her head thrown back, and her mouth open. On the table, by the side of a cup that contained some dregs of coffee, stood the phial, and holding this up to the light, Ahmed found it to be empty. He then took out the little bottle that had been used on

the previous evening, and put it down in place of the other, which he now pocketed. In the meantime he studied the position in which Marie was sitting, and came to the conclusion that she had moved very little since he had seen her three hours before. He was in the act of closing the door behind him, as noiselessly as possible, when he caught sight of a tall grey figure advancing towards him from the end of the corridor. The executioner passed quickly by in silence, but drew back the hood of the dark lantern he carried, so as to throw a shaft of light on Ahmed, who had stood dead still. And he had soon disappeared down the staircase leading to von Baltzan's quarters; but the impression which his sinister side-glance had produced did not fade away so rapidly. "What if this man comes back?" thought Ahmed; "suppose something in my face betrayed me when he turned his lantern on it just now?" However, the doctor was too much a man of action to pause to consider what might happen in circumstances which were beyond his control. He therefore followed the other down the corridor almost immediately, and re-entered the ward where he had left Elsa to complete her share of the work. This she had, with great reluctance, already done, so that the unconscious woman was lying on the bed fully dressed but without shoes. As Ahmed now required no further assistance from Elsa, and wanted to make sure that she should not be implicated in what he was about to do, he persuaded her to go at once to her own room, charging her not to leave it until summoned by him next morning, when he would have to perform an extremely difficult operation, during which he would

need her aid in a new capacity. But if in the meantime there was an alarm, and others should come to look for her, she must on no account be roused easily. Elsa understood all that his final warning implied, and a mist of tears shut him out of her sight as they silently took leave of one another. She could not approve of what he was doing; yet, filled with horror as she was at the bare idea, she had assisted in its execution without fear of consequences, or regard to the moral responsibility which such a deed entailed.

For his own part, Ahmed had no more doubt that his present plan was the best possible, than when he had brought home the amputated limb from the laboratory in order to mend the dachshund's shattered thigh-bone. If any one could have saved the life of Countess Lichtenthal, after the second shock, he would have done it; but even the Professor had taken a hopeless view of the case, and had only agreed to the proposed operation, as affording a remote chance of recovery, in the face of otherwise certain death. It would be a very great surprise to him to hear by-and-by that this operation had proved entirely a success, and the thing which Ahmed dreaded most, next to the failure of his scheme, was the task of telling Dr. Weigand how this had come about; for explanation of some sort he must make, but as far as possible he would avoid particulars, in the hope that the enormous amount of work the Professor got through each day would divert his mind from a case with which he had finished. The danger of detection in any other quarter he considered so small that it might be neglected. The risk would be run once and for all that night. As he had determined to

incur this risk, and as his preparations were now finished, he dismissed from his thoughts all considerations of what might happen afterwards and concentrated his whole attention on the dying woman. The end came very slowly, and it was past midnight when she ceased to breathe. But even then it was difficult to believe her dead, so well had the drug preserved the peaceful expression of sleep. Having lowered the lamp Ahmed cautiously opened the door of the ward, and looked along the passage in both directions. He then walked swiftly down to the end ward, and after unlocking the door, hurried back to the head of the stairs. When he had listened there for a few seconds to hear if any one was coming up, he went to the room where the body lay, lifted it in his arms and carried it quickly down the passage. Ahmed pushed the unlocked door open with his shoulder and entered, gently closing it behind him.

"Rise, Mariska!" he said in a low tone.

Marie got up at once from the bench on which she had been sitting so long; but her eyes remained shut.

When he told her also to take off her shoes, she obeyed and came towards him.

"Stand there," he said, pointing to a spot by the side of the door. He then set his burden down on the bench in as nearly as possible the same position which she had occupied, taking great care to place the body in a life-like attitude, the last touch of resemblance being given by putting Marie's well-worn shoes on the dead woman's feet. Ahmed had knelt down to do this, and he was just about to get up again, when a sound from outside suddenly arrested his movements. Catching

his breath, he stopped to listen, and soon distinguished the cause of his alarm. It was the sound of regular footsteps approaching down the corridor, they were fast drawing near, and before long he could recognise the ryhthmic tread of Baron von Baltzan. "That man in grey did suspect me, then, and he has communicated with the Governor," thought Ahmed. What was he to do? Whatever it was, it must be done quickly. Glancing round at Marie, who stood motionless a little to one side of the door, and at the figure he had posed on the bench by the stove, he went over to the sleeping Frau Schmidt, and quietly moved her chair back several feet. Then, after bringing the table with the lamp into the space thus left free, he came softly towards the door and placed his ear close against it. Strangely enough, acute though his hearing was, he only caught the sound of a single footstep, and yet he did not think that the tread of any man could be so light as to escape him at a short distance. Was von Baltzan alone, then? Well, it would not be long now before he knew, thought the doctor, as he took the little blue bottle out of his pocket and uncorked it, smiling at the fragrant odour of peach kernels which was diffused. Another question also flashed into his mind in that brief moment of waiting. Would the sacrifice of his life secure a respite for her? If so, his purpose was accomplished.

After what seemed to Ahmed an interminable delay, there came a tap on the iron door. He paused a few seconds, then drew back the panel inside the grill, and whispered "Sh —!" He was standing well back out of the line of sight, and could neither see von Baltzan nor be seen by him, Marie being in a similar position

on the other side of the door. He knew that the Governor was looking in through the trap, and he waited breathless for the door to be opened. But, for some reason, von Baltzan appeared to hesitate about coming into the ward. He made no move of any kind for over a minute, remaining invisible to the doctor, who meanwhile suffered an eternity of suspense. At last, however, with a deep-drawn sigh, he turned away from the door.

Ahmed breathed freely once again, and listened to the receding footsteps of the Governor with a growing sensation of relief as they gradually became faint. He knew then that he could not have borne this dead weight of silent uncertainty much longer; his limit of mental endurance had been all but reached, and in another second he felt that he must have cried out aloud. Fearless of death and indifferent to pain, he could meet danger face to face without flinching, but he had not the courage which can calmly abide the slow closing of the unseen hand of fate. That was the one quality possessed by his own people that Western culture had robbed him of, giving him in its place an indomitable desire to struggle against the force of circumstance. This impulse had led him on, step by step, till he found himself in violent conflict with the law, and had urged him to carry out his plan, no matter how slender its chances of success might be. Therefore the Governor had no sooner gone than Ahmed recovered his usual composure; he felt also a sense of shame at having been, even momentarily, unnerved. He was sure now that the executioner had guessed nothing, and that von Baltzan's visit had only been

prompted by a feeling of sympathy for the condemned woman.

It never occurred to him that a way to retreat was still open. He well knew that the attempt to rescue Marie would constitute a crime; but he had made up his mind to commit that crime, and if it were found out he was provided with a swift, though rather painful, means of escape in the bottle that he now returned to his pocket. Having extinguished the lamp, Ahmed poured the oil remaining in it on the heap of cinders beneath the stove and set it back on the table, so that it might seem to have burnt itself out. He then slowly opened the door, looked out into the passage, and listened a few seconds. Not seeing a sign of any one in the dim-lit corridor, nor hearing the smallest sound, he whispered to the woman who had stood motionless by his side all the time, "Come, Mariska!"

She took the hand he gave her and followed him out, walking as though in a dream, with her eyes closed. Gradually he pulled the door to behind them, and, holding the catch of the spring lock back with his key, let it fall silently into its place. For this had to be done without in the least degree disturbing the slumbers of Frau Schmidt. He then led Marie quickly down the passage and into the ward that Countess Lichtenthal had occupied until half-an-hour before.

"Wake, Mariska!" he said, drawing his hand gently across her forehead, as soon as he had turned up the lamp. After a slight quivering of the eyelids her eyes opened, and she looked around her with an expression of wonder.

"Where am I?"

"Safe," answered Ahmed.

"What has happened? How did I get here?" asked Marie in the same hoarse tone of surprise.

"Is it not enough that you are safe, Mariska?"

"Yes, yes, of course; nothing else matters; you have taken me away from the prison, then?"

"Not yet; but I will before very long."

"You can, doctor?"

"If you obey my orders, yes."

"I have done so always; I will do anything you tell me," said Marie, throwing her arms round his neck and clinging to him in a sudden access of fear.

"Even though I ask you to trust me blindly; to place yourself in my hands?" he said slowly, gazing at the agonised woman with a curious look of pity.

"I will obey, whatever it is you ask, doctor."

The perfume of her warm breath encircled him, and their lips were so near together that if he had bent his head forward ever so little they must have touched. It seemed to Ahmed that he was sinking beneath the surface of a fathomless sea, drawn down by the almost impalpable pressure of this woman's embrace, and as her mouth formed itself into that well-remembered smile a wave of emotion swept through his brain. He stretched out his hands unconsciously, and was about to clasp them round Marie's waist, when on a sudden there came between him and her the vision of another face, perhaps less lovely but more spiritual: the face of Elsa, staring at him with a pained look of reproach and bitter disappointment. For an instant he could scarcely believe that she had not entered the room, and so vivid was this impression on his mind that he

turned his eyes towards the door to make sure that she was not really there. As he did this, he gently released Marie's arms from about his neck; the thought of Elsa awakening Ahmed to what a depth of ingratitude he would fall if he betrayed the confidence she had placed in him that night. For his sake she had helped him to save this woman from certain death, for his sake she had even stifled her jealousy; against her instinct, Elsa had left him alone with the one rival that she feared, and he was within a little of proving that it would have been wiser to play the spy on him. And quick upon the heels of this thought there followed another. Had he not also been on the verge of making that one false step that might have wrecked his scheme? But, in spite of conscience and of reason, it was next to impossible to resist the silent appeal of those burning, sensuous lips that tempted him to forget all else but the fulfilment of a long-cherished, overmastering desire. Marie's hands still held fast to his, and their fingers had become interlaced, so that he could not free himself without using more force than he had the heart to put forth. But, after one last strong convulsive closing of the fingers, she gradually relaxed her grasp; then, dropping her hands to her sides, she turned her head away from him.

"Mariska," he said, "you promised to obey me."

"Yes," replied Marie, with a choking sound in her voice, as though struggling to suppress a sob.

"Listen, then," said Ahmed, speaking with an accent of command, but not unsympathetically. "I am going to prepare a sleeping-draught, and you must be ready to take it in a few minutes."

When the doctor returned he found Marie lying in bed with one arm across her eyes. Guessing that she held it in this position to hide her tears, he placed his hand upon her feverish brow, and said in a kindly soothing tone —

"Do not weep, my dove; the world has been very cruel to you till to-day, but henceforth it shall give you of its best. Come now, try and drink this!" he added, offering her a cup he had brought with him. "You won't dislike it, and it will dry your tears." She uncovered her face, and, raising her head a little, swallowed down the hot sweet wine as quickly as the continuous throbbing of her breast would allow. Then turning her eyes to Ahmed, she said with a trembling note of pathos in her broken voice, "It had a bitter taste towards the end, but I drank it all, as you told me, doctor."

"That was good, Mariska," he said, taking the cup from her; "and now compose yourself — think only of what I told you: that from to-day life will be made easy for you, while no memory of what has gone before will ever trouble you again."

"There is one thing I can never forget," said Marie, slowly, as if she were thinking aloud, in a tone that sounded far off; "one memory that will remain with me to my last hour: his look that night when he first felt the noose about his throat. It was a look that told me that he knew I had lured him to his death. That is why I am so much afraid to die, because I dare not meet him, face to face, before the judgment-seat of God." Her voice sank into a whisper as she spoke these last words; and, letting her head

fall back upon the pillow, in a few moments she was fast asleep.

Ahmed, who had been struck with horror at her unconscious confession, watched her a little while longer; then, kneeling down beside her, he shaved away the hair that grew so low down upon her forehead, for some distance. After binding a pad of prepared gauze over the place he had laid bare, he picked up the black velvet dress that Marie had taken off, and quietly left the room with it.

"Elsa was right," he thought; "this woman is guilty, Well, so much the greater need was there to wipe out the past!"

XX

It was still dark when the doctor roused himself to look at his watch; but, as soon as he had struck a match, he saw that it was already half-past six, and before long the grey light of dawn poured in through the surgery window. Nor had he waited many minutes when a sound of heavy footsteps reached him from the direction of the prison. After a short while he heard the door that led into the infirmary open. Then amidst the little group of men, which moved slowly down, the passage towards that other door at the farther end of it, he could detect the presence of one whose feet were dragged along, as though their owner lacked the power to lift them from the ground. And the aspect of this man was as plain to Ahmed as if he had seen him.

Knowing that all would soon be over with Mnischko and that he would shortly be called on to add the final irony of attesting the cause of death, he went out into the corridor directly it had grown quiet again, in order to be ready when Holtzmann should come to summon him. He wanted also to make certain that no one else should enter the end ward before the time arrived for him to bring the condemned woman out. No one would wish to take this task out of his hands, to be sure; but it was nevertheless well to show that he only waited for their signal.

They did not keep him waiting long; for, though the second-hand of his watch had never seemed to creep so slowly round the dial before, Ahmed was surprised to see how brief a space of time had really passed when the chief warder appeared in the doorway and beckoned to him. Already the remains of the beheaded had been placed in a rough wooden shell; but it was not without an inward shudder that the doctor could bring himself to make the necessary examination. And he was grateful to von Baltzan for hurrying through these formalities as quickly as possible. So soon, therefore, as the requirements of the law had been satisfied, the coffin was borne away by two of the attendants.

"You would like to fetch her yourself?" von Baltzan asked Ahmed.

"Yes," replied he.

"Then it is time," said the other gravely.

"She will not be conscious of what happens."

"So much the better!"

The doctor left the great dismal chamber in which the one feature that struck the eye was an upright block, draped in black, and bathed in the cold light that fell on it from three open casements. Going into the end ward, Ahmed shut the door carefully behind him, and stood still a moment so as to regain complete control of his nerves. It was a great relief to him to find that the attendant had not awakened, since she must inevitably have noticed something strange in the immobility of her charge. Fortunately, however, little else in the appearance of the dead woman suggested that she was no longer alive. The doctor bound a

large silk muffler over her eyes; then taking Frau Schmidt by the elbows, he shook her to and fro until she showed signs of coming to herself. But before she was aware what had happened he went back to the Countess, and placing her left arm across his shoulder and his right arm round her body, lifted her to her feet.

"Open the door," he said brusquely to the attendant who was still half asleep. She obeyed the order mechanically, muttering as she walked over to the door, "I must have dropped off again."

"Well, that doesn't matter now," said Ahmed.

"I can't tell how I could, though," said the woman, in a puzzled tone as she fumbled with her keys.

"You were tired out. I told you the stuff would not have the same effect again." While he said this, he moved towards the door, holding the dead body so that it seemed to be that of a semi-conscious woman who clung to him for support. As he passed out Frau Schmidt exclaimed in a whisper —

"Her dress?"

"Oh," said the doctor, with a frown, "you want that, eh?"

"It is mine by right," she answered, shuffling away down the corridor.

Ahmed carried the lifeless figure into the centre of the big bare room and let it sink gently down upon its knees, the head resting on the block. And as he did this only one of the silent men who were standing round it observed him closely. Von Baltzan had at once turned his eyes away and furtively passed his hand across them, while the others under his command had done much the same, either being, like Holtzmann,

genuinely affected, or following suit as a matter of discipline. But the tall red-bearded man in grey holding a sharpened sword had, from the instant Ahmed entered the room, watched his every movement. And now there occurred one of those terrible pauses that shake the most iron nerves; for if men have braced themselves to witness some awful sight an unwonted delay is more than flesh and blood can bear. At last the silence was broken by von Baltzan speaking in a hoarse voice —

"Is there anything wrong?"

"This woman is dead?" replied the executioner.

"She is insensible," explained von Baltzan; "it was agreed that she should be made so."

"She is dead!" insisted the other.

Ahmed stepped forward, and, kneeling down beside her, lifted the woman's cold hand. Then, taking a lancet from his pocket, he said to the executioner, "Come here, and convince yourself." The doctor drew the point of the knife lightly across one of the limp fingers, and immediately a red stream welled out from it.

"H'm!" muttered the man in grey. "I could not have believed it possible."

The executioner stood to one side, poising his sword in the air, and the others covered their eyes.

This time the Governor ordered them to take the body back to the ward, and for a little while Ahmed was hard at work with his sleeves rolled up. As von Baltzan had said when he first heard of what the doctor proposed to do, it was a ghastly business; more so even

than the honest Governor dreamt of. And familiar as the doctor had long been with all the horrors of the dissecting-room this was an ordeal at which his soul revolted. Yet not only were there tell-tale traces that must be removed before he could hand the body over to those who would destroy it; but it was also necessary to carry out a semblance of the operation he had described to von Baltzan, who, though incapable of understanding the details of such a process, had taken an involuntary interest in it. So much indeed had his curiosity been excited that he came himself to the ward before Ahmed had quite finished. But the gruesome spectacle that met his eyes made him wish he had not ventured to look again on the face of her whose beauty he had so greatly admired in life. He left at once with a heavy heart, and the firm conviction that he could never take the doctor's bloodstained hand in his again. Soon, however, men came to bear the body away, and nothing remained to mark its presence there but a black velvet gown with some ugly smears upon the bodice.

Ahmed hurried off to his surgery carrying a little heap of things in his apron; these he soaked in paraffin and burnt piece by piece, giving a sigh of relief when they were finally consumed. Then, having washed his hands and having made various preparations for the coming operation, he went across to Elsa's room. The fact that the nurse answered directly he called her name, made him fear that she must have heard those footsteps coming and going outside her door. And though she had seen nothing, no doubt her imagination would have supplied a vivid picture of all that passed.

After telling her that he should want her assistance shortly, the doctor let himself into the ward where Marie was lying. She, at any rate, had slept on peacefully, undisturbed by these muffled sounds. Moreover, when he looked closely at her placid expressionless features he could see no sign that she had been troubled by disquieting dreams; even the haunting memory of her victim's face seemed to have been absent from her mind in sleep. Soon it will be banished altogether thought Ahmed, as he began to get ready for the operation. And before long he was joined by Elsa, who, in spite of her deadly pallor, went about the work of setting things in order with a resolute air. The young man could not help being struck by her splendid courage, and much as he had always admired her his heart was now filled with a new tenderness. Having determined to help him, Elsa made no protest when Ahmed explained what he required her to do, and although she had never been called on to administer chloroform before, the nurse felt sure she could give it safely. This left the doctor to operate alone; but he was accustomed to work single-handed in the laboratory. Besides, what he was about to do depended on his ability to repeat an experiment which he had performed with success on the brains of animals, and, as it did not involve the section of large arteries, he could the more easily dispense with the services of an assistant.

When Marie awoke about noon her eyes opened wide with astonishment on seeing the nurse, who stood by her bedside, holding a basin of beef-tea out to her. She ate it greedily, glancing up every now and then at

Elsa's pale face, as though curious to know what sort of person this red-haired woman was who had taken the doctor's place. But to Elsa it seemed hardly possible that she was not attending the same patient as yesterday, so wonderfully like the Countess did this stranger appear. Only with the greatest difficulty could she persuade herself that the dying woman had not made a marvelous recovery during the night. For in spite of the bandage across Marie's forehead, her resemblance to Countess Lichtenthal was even more striking close at hand than it had been when Elsa saw her through the grill; and it was not until she had looked at Marie's features for a long time that she could perceive any single point of difference. Then it was merely a slight pucker to one side of the mouth, which, however, became more marked as soon as the woman spoke.

"Where is the doctor?" she asked, pushing the empty bowl away.

"He will be here directly," said Elsa.

"Your face is strange to me," said Marie, slowly; "you aren't one of the prison attendants?"

"No."

"What are you doing here, then?"

"Helping the doctor."

"Oh, he brought you with him?"

"Yes."

"You have known him a long time?"

"Yes."

"And you are very fond of him?" asked Marie, with a sly look at Elsa, adding, when she remained silent, "Is he your husband?"

"No!" answered Elsa in a low voice, her pallid cheeks suddenly becoming suffused with colour.

"Ah!" exclaimed Marie, with a smile that clearly displayed the expression of base cunning which formed the sole defect in an otherwise perfect face. To the nurse, who had been taught to observe such things, this expression revealed the history of a sordid life, and reminded her of all she had read about Marie at the time of the trial. It showed her that the woman was by nature heartless and by training the sport of man's passion. How could such a creature distinguish between right and wrong? And since she had made a trade of love, why should she not in cold blood have helped to kill a man for gain? Elsa experienced the warning sensation that a dangerous woman never fails to inspire in the breasts of all who are of her own sex; and, selfish in one thing, she offered up a silent prayer of thanks that Ahmed had escaped from this woman's toils. It gave her a glow of pleasure to feel that perhaps she had rescued him from the fate of the murdered man. Elsa did not then stop to consider how, if Marie were the abandoned creature she thought her, it would be a refinement of cruelty to foist her upon the Grand Duke in the place of his beloved wife. For she had already accepted Ahmed's view that there was no other way of saving his Royal Highness from life-long regret, and she had no idea even what kind of operation he intended to perform, though she guessed from his anxiety and the nature of his preparations that it was an extremely difficult one.

About one o'clock Ahmed entered the room, carrying

a big leather bag which he set down carefully on a disused table.

"Well, Mariska," he said in a cheerful tone, coming over to the bed, "how are you this morning? None the worse for a good night's rest?"

"I am all the better," she answered.

"That's right. No headache?"

"Not the least."

"Ah, I'm glad you've had a nice long sleep," said Ahmed, "because I wanted you to rest before I performed a trifling operation that is necessary. One of the burns you received the other day threatens to leave an ugly scar, unless we draw the skin together a little. And as this would be rather painful if you were wide awake, I am going to send you off again."

"Won't the place get all right of itself?" she asked.

"Possibly," he answered; "but it will spoil your good looks if it does."

"I suppose you must do whatever you think best," she said, in a tone of resignation.

She remained quite passive while he fixed a curious funnel-shaped mask over her face. And before long her deep regular breathing showed that the anæsthetic had produced its usual sensation of choking, quickly followed by an absence of any conscious sensation. Elsa continued, from time to time, to drop some chloroform into the metal receiver, while Ahmed was rapidly making his final preparations. He first put a long narrow table, with a mattress on it, near the bed, in a position where most light was to be obtained. Then from the surgery he fetched, besides cans of hot and cold water and some basins, the dental machine he had

bought in Leipzig. When he had placed this by the side of the table farthest from the bed, he gave the treadle two or three turns in order to make sure that the small circular saw, which had been previously inserted in the movable socket, was revolving freely. He next pulled his coat off, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and slipped on a loose oilskin smock. Again he washed his hands, scrubbing them in soap and hot water, and afterwards plunging them into a solution of carbolic acid. Then, having taken certain instruments and a bundle of dressings out of his bag, he made a solution of biniodide of mercury with warm water in one of the basins, and dropped a piece of lint into it. Everything being now ready, he lifted Marie's limp and apparently lifeless body up in his arms and laid it on the operating-table.

To Elsa's intense surprise he left the bandages on the woman's throat undisturbed, and removed one that was bound tightly round her head. For as yet the nurse had been unable to fathom the object of this bandage, while she had naturally supposed that the operation which Ahmed was about to perform would simulate an extensive grafting of skin, such as he had described to her in his letter from Wilhelmsbrunn. But she now saw that the front of the woman's head had been prepared for an operation of a much more serious character than that which she had hitherto imagined to have been intended. The exact nature of this operation she could not guess; nor, though she was standing on the opposite side of the table within a few feet of Ahmed, could she follow his movements with any degree of certainty, as the administration of the anæs-

thetic demanded the closest attention on her part. Vaguely, however, it seemed to her that, on the woman's forehead, where the hair ordinarily grew, he made a wide semicircular incision, and pulled a long flap of scalp, together with the underlying membrane, downwards so as to expose the bony surface beneath. Then by means of a high-geared apparatus driven with the root, such as dentist's use for drilling a hole in a tooth, he sawed in a circle through the skull. When he had removed the separated piece of bone, he wrapped it in the lint that had been soaking in the tepid antiseptic solution, and set it down beside his instruments. At the same time he glanced at a diagram which he had also placed on the table.

From that point onwards Elsa could no longer see what he did; but she knew instinctively that the crucial moment had come, and, leaning over to him, with a towel she gently wiped away the perspiration that stood in big drops upon his brow. Ahmed had paused for an instant, not only in order to look once more at the sketches of a similar operation carried out by Petrakoff's nameless friend, but to see whether the unconscious woman exhibited any symptoms of collapse. On finding that there was no ground for alarm on this account, he made two cuts at right angles through the outer covering of the brain, and drew it apart from the centre so as to leave the inner membrane bare. This he tore away, and left exposed the frontal convolutions — throbbing with each breath the woman took. Then, without a pause, he began to perform the ablation of those parts of the cortex where memory-pictures are stored. In this most delicate operation he used the

spatula-shaped handle of one of his metal scalpels, well knowing that the least deviation from the lines he had mapped out would damage sensory and motor areas which lie in close proximity to the association centres of the frontal lobe which he wished to reach, and would thus produce functional disturbances of a permanent character. But, notwithstanding two violent movements of the woman's eyes that terrified Elsa, as far as Ahmed could judge at the time his incisions should have entailed no unforeseen consequences.

Having stitched up the wound and bandaged it afresh, he then turned to a minor, yet important operation that must be performed in the interval before the patient came to. It was on the muscle connected with Marie's mouth, that his fingers had itched to cut during the trial. Quickly selecting the proper instrument, one with a long, thin, circular blade that terminated in a sharp flattened curve, he removed the inhaling mask from her face. Then he deftly plunged his knife under the skin, and in an instant had severed that branch of the facial nerve which actuated this particular muscle. Soon Marie was back in bed, and before she had even partially regained consciousness every trace of the operating-table and instruments had disappeared. For Ahmed could not bring himself to inflict an unnecessary wound on her throat in order to give colour to the supposed grafting. Who was likely, he asked himself, to examine it for minute scars? As for the patient herself, she was sure to suffer a little pain from the scorched skin when he re-dressed it, and would naturally imagine that a portion of it had been torn away. The main difficulty was to prevent her

from localising the real seat of the operation; but for some time to come her brain would be inactive, and when she had completely recovered, the doctor hoped that she would not trouble about anything that had happened meanwhile.

From that day the duties of both nurse and doctor were lighter, since the beautiful clean wound healed rapidly and soon became hidden by a new growth of hair, while Marie's temperature, which never rose very high, before long dropped to normal. So far the success of the operation had, therefore, been unmistakable, and the relief that this brought to Ahmed could only be gauged by Elsa, who had watched his set anxious face in the hours of suspense with the all-observing eyes of love. It was sufficient reward to her now to see him go about his work with his usual composure, and to know that she again had the chief place in his thoughts. She knew, too, that he was grateful to her for all she had done at his bidding. Not that he told her so in words, but from time to time, when their eyes met, she saw that he looked upon her in a new light, as one who was bound to him by a sacred and indissoluble tie. And, womanlike, Elsa had no feeling of remorse at the sacrifice she had made of her own free will, since her paramount wish was to be of service to the man she loved. She also perceived from Ahmed's manner with his patient that, whatever his interest in this woman might have been at one time, he had come to regard her solely in the light of a case. And, for her own part, Elsa was too good a nurse to let her personal dislike prevent her from paying the utmost attention to her charge.

But if the physical health of his patient no longer gave Ahmed any anxiety, her mental development was a matter that required very careful handling. Before many days had passed he came to the conclusion that he had been successful in eradicating her memory of past impressions. To begin with, on returning to consciousness, she had not recognised him, and since then she had always treated him as a stranger. Still it would take a considerable time to discover whether the association of ideas might not reawaken bygone memories, and to determine how far the other allied functions of her brain had been impaired. Was she, for instance, incapable of responding to any fresh impressions or impulses? The doctor tested these questions in a variety of ways, by gradually supplying the woman with new material for the exercise of her half-dormant faculties. At first he gave her some recent photographs of the Grand Duke that he had bought in the town; and when she had turned them over for a few days, he added several pictures of Wilhelmsbrunn. He persuaded Elsa to read to her for hours at a stretch from another copy of the book that the woman had herself been so absorbed in a little while before; and he watched the eager manner in which she listened to the interminable descriptions of court ceremonials, without giving a hint that she knew one word of the thin little story that wandered through them. It was obviously all strange to her, and as fascinating as ever.

One afternoon when she had been allowed to sit up. Ahmed gave her the photograph of a tall elderly man in an undress uniform, with a young and strikingly

beautiful lady by his side. Beneath the figures were written in a plain round hand the names, Hans and Amy. The woman recognised the sharp features and dignified bearing of the Grand Duke at once, and picking up one of the other photographs, held it out to Ahmed, exclaiming, with a look of inquiry —

"Hans?"

"Yes," said the doctor.

"But the Princess," she asked, staring hard at the picture, "who is she?"

"Yourself."

"Amy?" she said, looking troubled.

"Amalia, Countess Lichtenthal," replied Ahmed, slowly.

"Amalia," she repeated after him, and, glancing again at the name on the photograph, added with an accent of interrogation, "Amy?"

But suddenly a look of intelligence lighted up her face, and she cried out, "Am I really like that?"

"Yes, of course you are," he answered.

"As beautiful as this picture?"

"More beautiful!" he said, holding a small mirror before her face. "See."

After the woman had looked at her own reflection in silence for some time, she gave a great sight of contentment. Then, though she passed her hand once or twice over the short and almost colourless curls upon her forehead, with an air of wonder, she smiled, but chiefly with her eyes, her upper lip being raised ever so little, while the lower one remained almost immobile. But this pleased expression of hers came surprisingly near to that of the lady in the photograph,

who was also smiling slightly. And from that moment Ahmed told himself that there was no danger of the woman's past consciousness reasserting itself. If she had forgotten even what she looked like it was clear enough that her mind had become a blank. Moreover, he felt from her extreme susceptibility to suggestion that she would readily accept her altered circumstances as having always existed. The success of his operation had therefore been complete; but, on reflection, the young surgeon was inclined to give the credit for this to nature. To make what he had been fortunate enough to do possible, it would seem that the subject must either have an arrested intelligence or a brain which had become partially atrophied through long disuse. And he had rightly imagined that the mind of this woman only received direct impressions from the outside world, with little or no assistance from any antecedent idea. All that had been necessary then was to follow exactly the same lines that he had worked out in his experiments on certain highly organised animals, and that had been adopted by Dr. Petrakoff's friend in the case of the Schlüsselburg prisoner. But the fact that they had both been successful afforded no proof that they could have operated with like result on a fully developed and thoroughly active brain.

Ahmed's reports to the Grand Duke described the general condition of his patient as in the highest degree satisfactory; but added that, though she would no doubt soon be restored to perfect health, it was to be feared that for a considerable time her mind would remain, to a certain extent, affected by the shock she had undergone. For this reason the doctor begged

his Royal Highness not to order him to bring her straight back from Zwirnau, as he was anxious that she should be quite convalescent before being subjected to the least excitement. And to this further delay the Grand Duke consented in spite of his impatience to see his beloved again. Ahmed was well aware that her prolonged imprisonment had been extremely prejudicial to his patient, and that nothing but fresh air would bring the colour back to her cheeks. He, therefore, rode off next day through the deep but fast disappearing snow towards Ober Karlsdorf in search of a quiet place to which she might be removed, directly it was possible. And not far from that straggling village he found a spot exactly suited to his requirements. It was a little farm-house up in the pine-woods, much patronised in summer, but absolutely deserted at this unfriendly season. Still the proprietor said he could make him comfortable if his wants were simple, and he raised no objection to putting the whole of his house at the doctor's disposal. In any case there would have been no other visitors at such a time, and, but for the cows, there would not be a living creature within a mile of the Molkenhaus, except of course the man's own family and the farm servants. So, on his return, Ahmed told von Baltzan that he should take his patient away from the castle as soon as the roads were open. The Governor made no comment on this decision, beyond asking him to give Meissener notice of his departure in order that the prison might not be without a doctor. He had been unable to conquer the feeling of disgust with which Ahmed's supposed operation filled him; and, man of

the world though he was, could not bring himself to express any regret at parting with his guest.

A few days later the doctor watched the sun set from the castle heights for the last time. He had gone round the prison in the morning, and had said good-bye to Holtzmann, who seemed somewhat downcast at the prospect of being delivered again into the unsympathetic hands of Meissener. For the little man was already on his way back from Berlin, and, as the roads were now quite free from snow, all Ahmed's preparations had been made for removing the patient that night, while she slept, so that to-morrow she would wake up in a room looking out on the forest above Karlsdorf. Away below in the flooded meadows, where a week before there had been a sheet of ice, the smooth surface of the water had the aspect of burnished gold. Above, the great disc slowly sank through red banks of mist; while all round the birds piped their shrill songs of praise, rejoicing that the land had been given back to them again. Lost in the contemplation of this scene, the doctor suddenly became aware of a dark figure standing by his side.

"The winter is over," said Father Klein.

"Yes," answered Ahmed; "it does not last long here."

"Not as long as in your country, of course. You will be going there soon?"

"I do not think so."

"Ah!" exclaimed the priest, in a tone of surprise. "But you are leaving Zwirnau?"

"Why do you say that?" asked the doctor. "I suppose Baron von Baltzan told you."

"No; I saw it in your face as you gazed out across the valley. It was the look of a man who is going away and who does not mean to return. What you had to do here is finished, doctor?"

"Yes, Father Klein; I am leaving to-night."

"Then, perhaps, I shall not see you again."

"I am afraid not."

"I said, perhaps, because I, too, am a bird of passage. I am going to the Royal Chapel at Burg Sachsenroda to take up the duties of a brother who is no more."

"Indeed!" said Ahmed, calmly, but with an inward sense of misgiving.

"It will be a wrench to leave my friends here," said the priest, pointing to the prison; "they have greater need of me than people who live in palaces, but the Grand Duke's wish is a command, and the members of our order are not free-agents."

"You had some purpose in telling me this?" asked the doctor, after a moment's pause.

"I confess it," said Father Klein.

"Well?"

"I wanted to show you that I forget nothing."

"But you will not make any use of what you know?"

"Except in the service of my Master."

"You mean ——"

"That should the safety of our people one day depend on you, I might remind you ——"

"There would be no occasion! I will gladly protect them, if I ever have the power."

"It might be in your hands sooner than you think."

"When that time comes, I shall keep my word."

"And I shall keep mine," said the priest.

With a courteous bend of the head, Father Klein then turned to go, and as he went down the path glanced at a crumpled piece of paper that he took from the breast of his long black robe. It was a telegraphic despatch from the College at Rome, containing a few disjointed Latin words that had no apparent sense, though with a meaning perfectly clear to the brother who held a key to the secret cypher of the order. Ahmed stood for a few moments looking straight in front of him, but seeing nothing of the landscape. He knew now the price that he might be called upon to pay for this man's silence.

Outside the two small circles of light round the carriage-lamps, the courtyard was plunged in darkness when the Governor's servants brought the covered litter down the steps that night. Although it had struck nine, and von Baltzan had long been due at the garrison casino, he waited to see that everything was done in order. After helping Elsa into the carriage, he shook her cordially by both hands, and thus contrived to avoid Ahmed, who in the meantime was distributing a handful of gold among the servants and grooms. A moment late the doctor gathered up the reins and, with a formal bow to the baron, which was acknowledged by a stiff military salute, started his horses into a trot. It was not quite eleven o'clock when he drew them up, steaming, at the door of the Molkenhaus, to which he had been guided by the pine-wood torches that a couple of men were holding at the top of the steep forest-road which led to the farm.

The proprietor himself ran out from the open doorway to welcome him, and Ahmed found that everything was in readiness within for the reception of his patient. A bright log-fire was burning upstairs, and before many minutes the unconscious woman had been put to bed in the room she was to share with Elsa. The doctor saw also how clean straw had been laid down for the horses in the great barn-like stable, and felt sure from this that the host of the Molkenhaus would not neglect any of his guests.

"Madame has been long ill?" the stout maid-servant asked when she took away the breakfast things next morning.

"Yes; for some time," answered Elsa.

"Ah, she'll soon get better here," replied the girl, with a sympathetic glance at the flaxen-haired lady who was reclining in an arm-chair supported by pillows and wrapped up in rugs. They were seated in a covered wooden balcony looking out upon a clearing that was bounded on the farther side by ascending rows of fir-trees. Not, perhaps, an altogether inspiriting view at this damp season; but to madame, as these good people called her, it seemed as though she had awakened in paradise. And from day to day she gained strength, so that in less than a week she was able to take short walks with Elsa. The semicircular cut in the skin above her forehead had healed completely, while the hair had grown over it again, and the separated piece of bone was now firmly fixed in its place. Indeed the wound had healed so well and caused her so little discomfort, that she had paid no particular attention to it, accepting Ahmed's word that

this injury had occurred at the same time as certain burns on her throat, the cause of which she had forgotten, and every trace of which had long since disappeared.

During their enforced companionship Elsa had been gradually drawn to this strange woman, with the mind of a young child, to whom everything in the world seemed new. And she had noticed most of all the change from the hardened creature, who had guessed her secret and asked her that cruel question, to one who was innocent of any evil thought. Suspicion had no place in an intelligence that could scarcely master the simplest ideas; and Elsa was touched by the way this woman trusted her. Even words came to her slowly as though she were learning the names of things for the first time, and all abstractions were beyond her grasp. She existed only in the present, taking pleasure in the veriest trifles; as indifferent to the greatest joys that life holds as she was ignorant of its sorrows; and so, in all human probability, she would continue to the end, knowing neither love nor hate, neither hope nor fear.

Each day Ahmed devoted several hours to her education, teaching her to observe the common facts of nature and to find a beauty in the woods and streams and in the changing aspect of the sky, to which she had hitherto been dead, while Elsa listened in wonder at the patience he displayed in explaining the same thing over and over again. But there was one thing that madame showed a strong interest in from the first. She never grew tired of looking at herself in the glass, and delighted in having her hair done by Elsa after the

fashion of the photographs Ahmed had lately given her. These showed a lady who was dressed in full court costume, and who wore a tiara of diamonds, and a great collar of pearls. Every now and then she would glance from these treasured pictures to her own reflection, always smiling as she recognised her likeness to them. At times, too, when the mirror was not within reach, she would pick up one of the photographs and stare at it for a while as though she required to be constantly reminded of her good looks. She should be happy in a palace, where all the walls will reflect her image, thought Elsa.

And, indeed, madame had some reason to be vain, for six weeks of fresh air had brought the colour back to her cheeks, and given a new sparkle to her eyes. Her rose-red lips now struck the dominant note in a face that an artist might have despaired of transferring to his canvas, so delicate were its gradations of tone. But in her flesh tints and features Ahmed perceived an increasing resemblance to the picture of Countess Lichtenthal as "Maria Stuart." This woman also looked like a queen, and possessed the grace of gesture and freedom of movement that are to be learnt only on the stage. She had, too, the unconscious charm that perfect health lends even to homely youth, and in her whole being there was but one discord. When she spoke, her voice sounded flat and toneless, as though she were repeating a lesson; and, try as he would, the doctor could not prevail upon her to utter the short name of "Hans" with an accent of enthusiasm. There was no longer any light or shade in her speech, just as there was no more passion in her heart; henceforth

she must depend wholly on her surroundings; her future would be one dead level of enjoyment or misery, as these were pleasant or the reverse. Even the delight she took in the contemplation of her beauty was guileless, and she made no effort to attract Ahmed, though they were often alone for hours together. Meanwhile he had been able to satisfy himself that she could remember nothing. For when he talked in the Cossack dialect, she did not appear to understand a word; nor did she show any sign of recognition when he called "Mariska."

Before long Ahmed came to the conclusion that he might now take her to the man who waited so impatiently for her. He felt that there would be no greater risk of a violent awakening to full consciousness at the present than at some future time. He even doubted whether the sudden plunge into a new and brilliant world would produce any perceptible reaction in her mind. Therefore, though her attitude was by no means absolutely certain, he decided that the hour had come when she must be subjected to this ordeal. With that purpose in view he rode over one morning to Wilhelmsbrunn, saw the Grand Duke himself, and made all arrangements for the return of Countess Lichtenthal on the next afternoon.

It was almost dusk when the open landau that had met them half-way from Oberkarlsdorf passed through the great gateway of the park. Facing the horses sat a lady wrapped in rich furs, alone, while on the seat opposite were Elsa and Ahmed. He noted the dazed expression of her large blue eyes, as she looked out over the broad green slopes of the park to the russet planta-

tions and the silver lake. She did not, however, seem to pay special attention to any particular beauty of the landscape, though its general air of grandeur evidently impressed her. And it was Ahmed who first caught sight of the Grand Duke standing on the same knoll, from which he had watched the departing carriage in the moonlight three months before. He was holding the big hound Sigurd by the leash, so that his wife might see that her favourite had not been neglected. The coachman drew up his horses when he reached this place, and the lackey, springing to the ground, flung open the door of the carriage.

As Ahmed helped the lady to alight, the Grand Duke came quickly towards her. "Hans," she cried, and soon she was nestling in his arms. But in his joy of seeing her again he had forgotten everything else, and had let Sigurd loose. The hound crept slowly up to them, with its nose on the ground, sniffed at the hem of the lady's dress for a moment doubtfully, and then raising its massive head, uttered a low growl. She shrank away, with a look of surprise, and in another second it would have flown at her throat had not the doctor prevented it. Seizing the stout leather thong in both hands, Ahmed dragged the powerful animal back, though it tore up the ground in its endeavour to get free.

"Is the beast mad?" exclaimed the Grand Duke.

"No; he has forgotten the Countess, that is all," answered Ahmed.

"Then I will have him shot!"

"Will your Royal Highness give Sigurd to me?"

"If you will take him, yes!"

XXI

THE pale stars were shining in a cloudless sky when Ahmed drove through the Augustus Platz that night; but, late as it was, the windows of Dr. Weigand's workroom were not yet dark. And those three faint splashes of light half-way up the dead front of the corner house reminded him that he would have to render an account of his actions on the morrow. Wearied, however, by the anxieties of the last weeks, he could not then decide how this was to be done, although he well knew that the Professor's suspicions would be aroused by one incautious word. The young man trudged up the stairs to his third floor in the Brüderstrasse, carrying his bag of instruments in one hand, and leading the huge slate-coloured hound with the other. Sigurd had hung his head dejectedly throughout the journey; in some inexplicable manner he appeared to have guessed that sentence of death had been passed upon him, and that he had only been saved by the doctor's intervention. He was following his new master into the hall when Fritz rushed out of the kitchen and jumped up at Ahmed, frantic with joy. But suddenly seeing the intruder, he turned upon him with a savage snarl. The hound did not take the slightest notice of this absurd little creature, but looked inquiringly with his great bloodshot eyes towards the doctor, and at the same time wagged his tail in a deprecating way.

"Down, Fritzchen, down!" said Ahmed. Frau Mänkel, hearing the dachshund's shrill bark, hurried out to greet her ever-welcome guest. She was almost as delighted at the doctor's return as Fritz himself; so much so, indeed, that she made no objection to harbouring the monster he had brought back with him, provided the two animals could agree together.

"They'll be good friends in a few minutes, you may be sure, Frau Mänkel."

"Fritzchen is jealous," explained the landlady.

"Well, he'll soon have Fräulein Hartvig to spoil him again," said Ahmed.

"She is coming home before very long?"

"Yes, in a few days."

"Ah, that's good news!"

"And then we are to be married."

"Really? I am so glad! When is it to be?"

"I don't know yet; there are many formalities to be gone through first, and I have not received any letters lately."

"I have put several on your table."

"They can wait till to-morrow."

"You are tired?"

"A little."

Still, in spite of his fatigue and a certain sense of relief, sleep did not come easily to the doctor that night. He was troubled by the thought of Elsa, whom he had left behind at the palace. It had been necessary, but he bitterly regretted that this additional burden should have fallen on the nurse, about whose own health he was anxious. It was, therefore, with a feeling almost of remorse that he eventually shut his eyes. Never-

theless, when he awoke next morning he was somewhat consoled by the reflection that Elsa's ordeal would soon be at an end. And the sight of Sigurd, peacefully dozing on the floor by his bedside, told him that all danger of detection had been removed. After he had roused the dachshund that was lying curled up at his feet, he took the two dogs for a run in the great Rossplatz, and rejoiced to see that they had already begun to fraternise. Having given them their breakfast, Ahmed sat down to his own, and began to look through the letters that had arrived for him during the last few days. None of them were of any particular importance, except one from the registrar, who requested him to call at the Standesamt. And there was a long letter from the Professor of Morphology at St. Petersburg, congratulating him on the discovery of the new anæsthetic, which Weigand had announced at the Medical Congress. Dr. Petrakoff also mentioned a rumour that had recently been current in official circles concerning the serious illness of Nasrullah Khan. Ahmed wondered, as he read these words, whether Father Klein had not heard this news through those secret and far-reaching channels of communication which are always open to the members of the society. Still, in the absence of any letter from his father, he could but doubt the truth of the rumour, and, his mind being fully occupied with other things, he gave the subject no further consideration.

Ahmed's first duty was to report himself in the Augustus Platz, and as he walked there, thinking over the line he should take with the Professor, his feeling of apprehension grew with every step. But the Ge-

heimrat was too pleased with the result of the operation to trouble much about its details. He received his assistant with open arms, and smiled as affectionately at him as though the young man were his own son.

"Well, my friend," said Weigand. "You have covered yourself with glory; and you are more modest about it than I should have been at your age. You made nothing of it in your letters."

"I was lucky, sir," replied Ahmed.

"Yes, by Heaven you were!" said the Professor. "All the same you managed the business cleverly enough. I was doubtful of its possibility myself. You weren't able to use the extract either?"

"No; I found it uncertain in its action."

"Tried it yourself, I suppose?"

"Yes, twice!"

"Ah! Well, I feared as much. You remember, I hesitated about fixing the quantity for the human subject, and I touched on this difficulty in my paper. By-the-by, what did you use?"

"Chloroform."

"Indeed. I should not have thought the patient's heart would — but it did not, and that's more to the point than my mere opinion. Now as to this new anæsthetic of yours."

"Mine?"

"Oh yes; it will be named after you now, my friend. All the world knows that you are its discoverer."

"Herr Geheimrat!" said Ahmed, in a tone of protest, and yet with gratitude.

"Young man," said the Professor, shaking his finger

at him playfully, "you cannot help becoming famous if you do this sort of thing."

"But it was you, your Excellency, who directed me throughout."

"Oh, that is easy enough at my time of life. I have so much experience; too much, perhaps, for me to make any more discoveries myself. Still, as you say, I can help others."

"You have been doing that all your life, Professor."

"I have tried!" said Weigand, with a certain inflection of sadness in his voice. "You see, my early days were spent among people who took no interest in my work; and consequently I did not get much help myself. So I have made it a rule to do what I could for all the beginners I've met, and however little that has been, at least I can say that I have never treated any of them unkindly."

"I can bear witness to that," said Ahmed.

"Well, your case is different from theirs," replied the Professor, laughing at the young man's earnestness. "Besides, I don't look on you quite as a beginner. You came to me with a reputation, which you have added to since. And I am rather afraid we shan't be able to keep you much longer, my son."

"I have no wish to leave Leipzig, Professor."

"Perhaps not! Still, you may have a call elsewhere, and, useful as you are to me, I shall not be so selfish as to stand in the way of your advancement."

"But if I am content to stay here?"

"I hope you are not," said Weigand, gravely. "We do not earn the right to be content until we have reached the limit of our capacity; and though you are no be-

ginner, your career is only at the beginning; just as mine is nearing the end. "Well," he continued in a lighter tone, "I have been approached unofficially about the appointment of an extra-ordinary Professor in one of our Universities. I am asked if I can recommend any one for the post, and I shall put forward the name of my present chief-assistant, unless you have any special objection."

As Ahmed remained silent, he added, after a slight pause, "We will consider that settled, then."

"I don't know how to thank you, Herr Geheimrat," said Ahmed, with an air of embarrassment that the Professor took to be the natural outcome of the young man's modesty.

"Never mind about that," he answered, patting him on the shoulder; "time enough to talk about thanks when you are appointed."

Ahmed went to his work in the room upstairs with a strange feeling of exultation. The prize had fallen to him; of all the thousands who longed to teach from the professorial chair he, the alien, had been chosen. But although he was by no means insensible to the honour about to be conferred on him, he valued it most because it was the thing that Elsa had coveted for him. He would be his own master now, while, as his wife, she would be looked up to and respected by the people whose good opinion she held so dear. For him, it would mean exile, and the surrender of any vague hope he might have cherished of ever reigning in his native land. To make that possible he must obey his father's command and return at once; for if he failed to do this

it mattered nothing that Nasrullah should be found wanting, another would surely take his place. Yet if he gave up the ambition to lead his countrymen a little forward on the path of progress, it would be to join the advance guard of that grand army, who are adding every day to the Empire of science.

That evening he wrote to Elsa, telling her of his unexpected stroke of good fortune, and Fritz, who had sat by his side while the letter was written, placed an inky paw on one corner of it, in token of approval.

"Yes," said Ahmed to himself, looking at the dachshund's long inquisitive nose and large intelligent eyes, "you are a true professor's dog, Fritzchen. But as for you, my friend," he continued, with an affectionate glance at the Great Dane, "you are more suited to a student, or, better still, to a hunter." And the young man sighed, as he thought of those hunts over the wild foothills after big game that he should never take part in again. His mind was reconciled to a life of learning, spent within the narrow circle of some old-world university; but his body craved for a wider sphere of action, for the chase that lasts from dawn to dusk, and for that deadly sport his people loved beyond all other things — the savage hunt that men call war.

On the following evening, when the doctor came home after a long day's work in the laboratory, he found a letter waiting for him. It was from Elsa, and had been written the night before.

"Dearest," it began, "I cannot describe how delighted I was to hear your good news. It is perhaps selfish of me to rejoice over much when I remember

all that you must abandon to accept this post. But it fills me with such pride to feel you are making so great a sacrifice for my sake, that I can think of nothing else. I forget everything except the prospect of those peaceful years that await us in our new home; and dearest, you know that I could not bear to lose you now, could not give you up, even for your own good.

"I have been in an agony of apprehension for these last few days. But, thank Heaven, my attendance here will soon be dispensed with, though I am glad to have had an opportunity of doing something for you that you could not trust to another. Everything has gone quite smoothly, and up till to-day I do not think there has been a happier man in the whole world than the Grand Duke. But perhaps his eyes are opening now to the mental condition of his wife. She, I need scarcely say, has been perfectly happy; content to be waited on hand and foot by a host of servants; pleased at being the centre of an admiring crowd of courtiers, though passively indifferent to the love of a devoted husband. She disappoints only those who expect some personal notice on her part. It distressed me to see how upset the excellent lady-in-waiting, Baroness Rensberg, was by the unresponsive manner in which all her affectionate advances were received. I have been obliged to tell her that the coldness would wear off in time, but that for the present her mistress has not fully recovered from the after-shock of a serious operation. His Royal Highness, of course, lives in the same hope, and is always looking for the expression he misses from that beautiful face. Since this morning, however, I am afraid he has ceased to hope that it will reappear there soon.

"The Grand Duke attended mass with her at the chapel in the Summer Palace. They drove in state to Burg Sachsenroda, people lining both sides of the way and cheering as they went by, and from what I heard them say I do not believe it would be possible to exaggerate the popularity of Countess Lichtenthal. Her husband was delighted with the reception they gave her, and I am told that she won all hearts by the gracious way she smiled on every one who came within her sight. My place in the chapel not being far from the gilded chair on which she sat, by the side of the Grand Duke, I was able to watch her closely throughout the entire ceremony. This seemed very solemn and impressive, even to one who has been taught to despise all outward shows of faith. On her, however, it produced no perceptible effect; she followed the service without a sign of emotion, standing when the others stood, and kneeling when they knelt. And when, towards the end of it, the choir sung a great anthem, her eyes alone remained dry.

Then there came to the altar-rails a tall man, who wore a black biretta and a gown with hanging sleeves. Speaking in a quiet, gentle tone, he drew a picture of the dark shadow of despair that had fallen on them of late only to be lifted that day, and of how the grief of their revered Prince had been shared by the humblest of his subjects, who were one with him in sorrow as in joy. So touching was the way in which he said this that all were again moved to tears, except the woman herself, who sat insensible as a statue, with a look of wonder in her steel-blue eyes. Yet, I doubt if this attitude of indifference was noted by any one but the

Grand Duke, though I am quite sure he saw it, and that it chilled his tender heart. The rest were carried away by a great wave of enthusiasm and hung on the lips of this priest — a stranger to them, I hear — who had given such eloquent utterance to their thoughts. After a slight pause the priest continued his discourse in a more exalted tone. 'A miracle has been worked,' he said, 'and in an age of little faith. But while there is faith among us even as a grain of mustard seed, we shall not have lost the power that moves mountains. Therefore, it may be well that we have seen, with our own eyes to-day, a manifestation of God's will as great as was the return of the daughter of Jairus to life. Let us then give praise to those whom He has made His instruments, but above all things let us not forget to give the glory to God.' These sentences so impressed themselves on my mind that I almost fancy I have set them down in his exact words, but I am not certain, however, that I grasped his meaning. There seemed to be something hidden behind the words, some hint at a knowledge this man could not possibly possess; an accidental suggestion, no doubt, and yet one that made me feel somewhat uneasy.

"In the afternoon we were visited by the Hofrat Engelbrecht. He conducted himself in the pompous style your description of him led me to expect, and appeared utterly incompetent to form an opinion on the case by the light of his own unaided judgment. Indeed, beyond asking her several commonplace questions, he did nothing to discover how she was; and if the issue had been less grave, I should have smiled at the barefaced way in which he consulted me — the

nurse. Well, the outcome of this was that he made a most favourable report upon my patient to his Royal Highness, lauding you to the skies, and prophesying that in a very few weeks her state of mind would be absolutely normal. And when the Grand Duke suggested that perhaps it might be as well to have the opinion of a specialist in psychology on this point, he politely shrugged his shoulders."

Elsa's letter closed with a string of affectionate messages, and an intimation that she would post it herself next morning, as she would not run the risk of its falling into any other hands than those of the man she loved.

"She was right," thought Ahmed; "it would not do for any one else to see this. They might read something between the lines, just as she guessed that there was a hidden meaning in the words of Father Klein."

Ahmed was so busy for the next few days carrying out a series of experiments the Professor had planned during his absence, that he had very little time to think of his own affairs. And one morning he was rather surprised not to find Weigand at his desk. But as the attendant informed him that his master had been called away early by a special messenger, Ahmed supposed that he had gone off to perform some critical operation in the neighbourhood and would return before night. However, the Professor had not come back by the time the young man went home, after a long day spent in tabulating the results already obtained. Nor was the great surgeon in his usual place next day when Ahmed entered the study at the accustomed hour. Weigand stood in front of the open fireplace warming his hands

with his back turned towards the door, and seeing that he seemed deep in thought, the young man passed on up the stairs leading to the laboratory. He had nearly reached the door when the Professor uttered his name in a low hoarse voice, but without turning in his direction. He stopped, not quite sure that he had heard aright, and on his name being repeated in the same tone, he came down the stairs again.

"Herr Dr. Ahmed," said Weigand for the third time, with an accent of reproach.

"Yes, Herr Geheimrat," answered the young man respectfully.

"Do you know where I was yesterday?"

"No, your Excellency."

"At Wilhelmsbrunn."

There followed a prolonged pause, during which neither of them spoke; and then the Professor went on with what he had to say, still keeping his face fixed upon the fire.

"The Grand Duke has once more consulted me about a mental case, and once more I am unable to agree with the opinion you have expressed, Dr. Ahmed."

After another painful silence the Professor continued. "I did not tell his Royal Highness that the condition of the lady yonder will remain unchanged, because I thought it wiser not to deprive him of that last ray of hope; but I see no probability of any change for the better, and I have reason to believe, from what I observed, that you do not really hold an opposite view. In fact," he added, slightly raising his voice and speaking deliberately, "I think you *know* it is impossible."

"Well, your Excellency?" said Ahmed.

"You do not deny this, then?"

"No."

"I was almost afraid you would," said the Professor, turning round and looking him in the face for the first time.

"Why?"

"Because you attempted to deceive me once; and had you tried to do so again, I might have been forced to take steps that I should have afterwards regretted."

"You do not propose to take any such steps now?"

"No."

"I am glad of that, your Excellency! For I cannot think that you would have benefited any one by undoing what I have done."

"That is why I have left things as I found them; why I want to know nothing more; why I am making myself a party to a crime. You do not understand, perhaps, what that means to a man who has a sense of right and wrong."

"I see no wrong in what I did."

"Exactly; you do not see it, and yet it is there all the same. Oh, I admit that your motive may not have been base; but even so, you violated the trust reposed in you by virtue of your office as a physician, and by so doing proved yourself unworthy of the confidence of your fellows; therefore I can no longer recommend you to my colleagues, Dr. Ahmed."

"I feared you would not, once you knew."

"But you hoped that I should never know?"

"I thought of nothing except that I was pledged to save this woman's life."

"At the cost of ruining your own."

"Possibly."

"I am sorry, my friend, more sorry than I can say. If I could sign the form that lies there," said Weigand, pointing towards his desk, "I would. But look at it yourself, and you will soon find that I cannot. They put me on my word of honour, Ahmed, on my word of honour!"

The Professor, who had walked over to the desk as he was speaking, now sank into a chair beside it, and buried his face in his hands.

"A man may not break his word," said Ahmed, "and therefore he should not give it lightly. I am to blame, because I gave mine to that woman without a thought of the misery my keeping it might cause another."

"You are not alone in the world?" asked the Professor, in a broken voice.

"No, there is one who will go with me."

"Go! Why should you go? You can stay with me, my friend."

"After you have ceased to trust me?"

"I have not said that, Ahmed; and though I cannot honourably recommend you as worthy of trust, I do not withdraw my confidence from you."

"But I should not possess it to the same degree as I have done up till now; there would be reservations on your part; from time to time doubts might even arise whether you had been right to trust me at all. No, your Excellency, I could not remain here under such conditions; neither of us would be at our ease, and the work must suffer in consequence."

"Where do you propose to go, then?"

"Back to my own land, to a people who put their faith in the sharp ear and the watchful eye."

"A savage people."

"Not wholly!"

"You told me that if ever you returned your brother would strive to murder you."

"Of course, it is natural he should."

"Then you are going to a certain death," Weigand exclaimed, starting to his feet.

"No," said the young man, with a faint smile. "He might be prevented from killing me. Besides, it is often safest to meet danger face to face. Good-bye, Herr Professor."

"Good-bye, Ahmed, and may the All-merciful bless and keep you," said Weigand, solemnly, raising his right arm, and gazing upwards with a look of supplication in his eyes. A moment later Ahmed silently left the room, and no sooner had the door closed behind him than the great man broke down altogether. He let his hands fall on the mantelpiece, and leaning forward in an attitude of utter dejection, murmured two short words over and over again: "My son! my son!"

In the meantime Ahmed made his way across the broad open space by the side of the town theatre. He walked slowly onwards, taking no note either of where he was going, or of the bright sunshine, or the keen March breeze. One thought only occupied his mind, the thought of how Elsa would bear this blow to her hopes, for it must be a terrible disappointment to her. He felt that it was cruel to have raised these hopes when they must be dashed to ground so soon. Of

course, he would not have told her had he foreseen what was going to happen, but why should he have anticipated that fate would deal him such a stroke as it had done that day? Full of these bitter reflections he went on and on, mechanically quickening his pace as he drew clear of the crowded thoroughfares, until he realised, all of a sudden, that he had wandered a long way from the Brüderstrasse, and at once turned homewards.

When he got back he flung himself down on the sofa in his big empty room, and, for the first time in his life, yielded to a feeling of utter helplessness. But soon he found that he was not alone: the dogs, hearing him come in, had deserted the kitchen, where Frau Mänkel was superintending the preparations for dinner. Sigurd rested his head on one of Ahmed's knees, while Fritz placed his two front paws on the other, and both silently stared up into their master's face. They were telling him, as plainly as if they had spoken, that they were there to console him, and, with the subtle instinct of their kind, they had chosen this moment to assure him that, no matter what misfortune had befallen him, he still had two faithful friends. Nor was he ungrateful to them for a sympathy which had been so unobtrusively expressed. Indeed it gave him fresh courage, and made him feel more hopeful about the future.

He had sat for a considerable time with his hands on the heads of his two dumb companions when the opening of the hall door startled him out of his musing. The dogs also heard this sound, which was succeeded by that of steps advancing towards them. Sigurd, without raising his head, gave a loud growl; Fritz,

however, did not attempt to bark, although he trotted off at once to the door. It was opened immediately by Elsa, who came quickly over to Ahmed, and, kneeling down, threw her arms round his neck. Whereupon the big hound edged away into a corner of the room, eyeing her askance, but making no further protest as soon as he perceived that her presence was welcome to his master. The young man rose, lifting Elsa from the ground, and held her tightly in his arms. After a little while she recovered her breath, which she had lost in running up the stairs, and gasped out a few disjointed sentences. "I was so anxious about you," she said, looking up at him, "I couldn't stop there any longer. I saw from his face yesterday that he had guessed, and last night I told them I must go. I was afraid."

"Of what, my treasure?" asked Ahmed, gently.

"I don't know! But I was uneasy about you, and all kinds of horrible thoughts came into my head."

"You thought I would take my own life?"

"Yes! I feared you might, in a fit of madness. Oh, I knew you wouldn't if you had time to think, if you remembered that you would be killing others as well. But I could not forget how you spoke about suicide at Zwirnau, and that made me feel afraid, if things went wrong."

"Well, you see your fears were unfounded. Things have gone wrong, and I am not dead."

"Thank Heaven!" cried Elsa, fervently.

"Nothing else matters, then?" he asked, with a grave smile.

"How could anything else matter, as long as I have you still?" she said.

"Elsa, you once told me that if need were you would follow me to the end of the world. Well, time, they say, puts all things to the test, and to-day I ask you to be as good as your word. Come with me to my own country."

"You must go back there, Ahmed?"

"Yes."

"Then, of course, I will go with you."

"My love," said he, kissing her. And for a time they were silent; but when at length they came to themselves, he asked her if she understood all that this promise meant. Was she willing to embrace the Mohammedan religion? For this would be necessary in order that he might make her his wife. Therefore she would not only have to turn her back upon the land of her fathers but upon their faith as well.

"I am ready to give up everything if I may be with you always," answered Elsa.

"Then, come what may," said Ahmed, in the deep, vibrating tone of one who takes an oath at the altar, "nothing shall ever part us now but death."

He had hardly spoken the words when there came a soft tapping at the door that was rendered almost inaudible by the loud growling of Sigurd and the shrill yelping of Fritz. "Down, dogs!" shouted Ahmed as he went to the door. On his opening it a dignified oriental in a semi-military costume stepped into the place left vacant by the maid-servant, who, after knocking, had discreetly retired into the background. The big, bearded warrior halted in the doorway and bent

his body slowly forward from the waist; then, raising his hands to the sides of his gold-embroidered turban, he gravely uttered the salutation, "Khan! Khan!" He had no sooner drawn himself up again to his full height than Ahmed caught him by both hands, crying out, with an accent of joyful recognition, "Saad Ali."

"Ahmed Abdullah!" replied his old friend in the same tone. Then, after a moment's pause, the young man asked how his father was.

"The Ameer is in good health," answered Saad Ali, "and yet he is much troubled in his mind, because his son lingers so long on the way."

"But my brother is with him," said Ahmed.

"The Prince Ebn Nasrullah is no more."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"How long?"

"For many days; he did not see the Moharrem. But before this can be made known, I must have brought you back, so that the Ameer may not be without an heir. Such a thing would surely provoke strife."

"It is my father's will, then, that I should one day sit in his place?"

"Yes, Khan!"

"What if I have taken to myself a wife here?" said Ahmed, pointing to Elsa, who had turned away and was standing by the window.

"Bring the woman with you," replied Saad Ali, without even glancing at her, as it would have been a breach of decorum to look upon the wife of another.

"But if she is not of our faith?"

"The Mullahs will instruct her in its principles."

"Are you sure that my father will not force some other woman upon me?"

"If, in time, there is a son born, the Ameer will be content."

Well knowing that this was the uttermost that could be hoped for, Ahmed did not try to extract any further assurances from his father's trusted envoy. And, after a brief consultation with Elsa, he promised to be ready to leave Leipzig in forty-eight hours.

Two days later a small group of people stood round the door of a reserved sleeping-car attached to the Berlin train, while at a respectful distance a crowd of loiterers had assembled to watch the departure of the Afghan Prince. For the news of this having got abroad, there was a widespread curiosity among the townfolk to see the distinguished stranger who had been residing in their midst. The report had also reached Zwirnau, causing the genial little Meissener to hurry over in order to bid good-bye to his colleague. And above him towered the tall Professor, who had come to grasp his favourite pupil by the hand for the last time.

"I need scarcely ask you not to relinquish your studies," said Weigand.

"No, Professor," replied the young man. "I have given too many years to the work for that, and though I may not have much time for research myself, I shall try to persuade others to take it up. I hope to found a new school of medicine, and perhaps your Excellency will help me in this."

"I shall be very glad."

"Herr Meissener has already promised to come out to us, by-and-by."

"I am greatly honoured," said he, beaming with unaffected satisfaction.

Just then the crowd in the background gave way a little, and three officers in brilliant, full-dress uniforms came forward. The foremost of these was Captain von Bredowshausen, who approached Ahmed and saluted in military fashion, while his two companions halted a few paces behind him. "His Royal Highness, the Grand Duke of Thüringen, begs your acceptance of this," said von Bredowshausen, handing a morocco case to Ahmed with a low bow.

"It gives me profound pleasure," he replied, slightly bending his head and opening the case as he spoke. On finding that it contained the insignia of the Grand Cross of the Thüringen family order, his cheeks became suffused with a flush, which the Grand Duke's equerry imagined to be of pleasure, but which Weigand knew to have been produced by a very different emotion.

"Please convey my most grateful thanks to his Royal Highness," said Ahmed, shaking hands with von Bredowshausen and his comrades.

In another moment the station-master advanced to warn them that the train was about to start. At the same time one of the guards fetched Frau Mänkel out of the carriage where she had been saying good-bye to Elsa and the dogs. The tender-hearted creature was in tears, and could hardly see Ahmed when he pressed her hands in token of farewell. But she continued to wave to Elsa, who had come to the window. Ahmed, still standing on the steps at the back of the car, leaned

over to take leave of the Professor and Meissener, while Saad Ali made sure that none of the servants nor any of their baggage was missing. The signal had been given, and the train had already started, when a sombre figure emerged from the crowd a little farther up the platform.

"Remember," whispered the priest as the carriage that was labelled "Eydtkuhnen" passed him.

"I shall not forget," replied Ahmed.

. . . . . .

Within a few months of that day the following letter arrived at Burg Sachsenroda from the Manresa Station on the slopes of the Hindoo Koosh:—

"My dear Father Klein,

"*P. C.*

"As we anticipated, the Ameer promptly acknowledged Ahmed Abdullah as his successor, and since then that young man's European wife has given birth to a son.

"This is well, for the Prince shows so excellent a disposition towards us, that you may rest assured our missionary work is safe.

"Yours sincerely in Ct.

"Conrade Berton, S.J."

The letter was sealed thus —